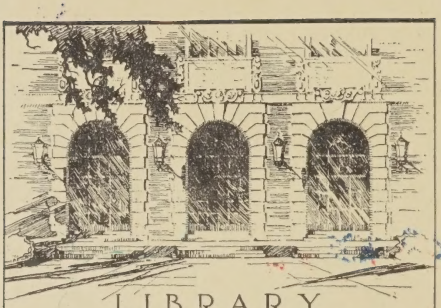

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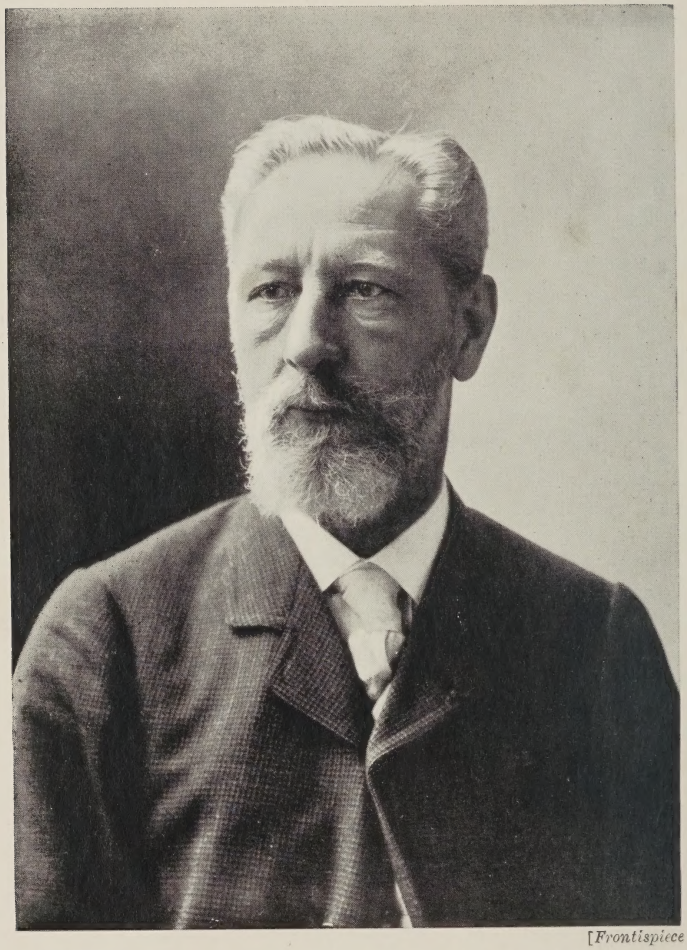
THE RUSSIAN NOVEL



[*Frontispiece*

LE VICOMTE E. MELCHIOR DE VOGÜÉ

THE RUSSIAN NOVEL

BY

LE VICOMTE E.-M. DE VOGÜÉ

TRANSLATED FROM THE ELEVENTH FRENCH EDITION BY

COLONEL H. A. SAWYER

WITH SIX PORTRAITS

LONDON

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1913

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A FEW words as to the author himself might be of interest.

The Vicomte E. Melchior de Vogüé was born at Nice on February 24, 1848. His mother was English — a Miss H. Anderson of renowned beauty.

His ancestors, who took their part in the Crusades, were "seigneurs" in the Province of Vivarais (now the Département of the Ardêche).

De Vogüé went through the War of 1870–71, was wounded at Sedan, and spent eight months as a prisoner in Magdeburg.

On returning to France, he was decorated with the "Medaille Militaire" and was appointed attaché to the French Embassy at Constantinople, where his cousin le Marquis de Vogüé was Ambassador, and spent three years there and travelling about in the East.

His first publication (1876) was entitled *Syria, Palestine and Mount Athos.*

Appointed Secretary in 1877 to the Embassy at St. Petersburg, and there marrying the sister of General Annenkoff, of Transcaspian renown, he naturally took a great interest in Russia, studying its language and its people, in town and country, for five years.

Leaving the diplomatic service at the time Maréchal de MacMahon left the Elysées, he and his young Russian wife settled down in Paris. He then definitely took to literature. In 1886 he finished writing the present volume, *The Russian Novel.*

This book forced open for De Vogüé the doors of the Académie Française.

He was admitted in 1889, and his fame dates from that time. For thirty-five years he was a regular contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in which he wrote remarkable articles on current events. Meanwhile, he also wrote three novels, which were well received all over the world. *Les Morts qui parlent, Jean d'Agrève, Le Maître de la Mer.*

Russia was grateful for his work and received him with much ovation when, in 1909, the author went there for the last time to take part in the festivities in connection with Gogol's centenary. He was a born writer, and his style is brilliant. He has often been compared to Chateaubriand. To the end of his life he was a hard worker.

He died after a brief illness in Paris, in March 1910.

Although De Vogüé admitted the utility of translators—styling them the "indispensable post-horses of literature"—he heartily abhorred their paraphrasing propensities.

Respect for the author's opinion—having now almost the force of a testament—may be accepted in explanation for the closeness of this translation.

H. A. S.

July 1913.

NOTE

At the end of the book will be found a glossary and explanation regarding the spelling and pronunciation of the Russian names.

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THE ARGUMENT

(*Abridged and freely translated*)

In offering this book to those interested in Russian literature—daily increasing in numbers—a few words are advisable in explanation of its object, and as to the intentional omissions. The country we are about to visit is vast in extent and unknown as a whole, though some tracts have already been marked out by a few, and it may be as well to show why some of its provinces are visited and others not.

It is not intended to be a complete history of Russian literature. Such a work does not as yet exist in Russia and would be premature in France. It would have been tempting to me, had I only sought the suffrage of the learned. But my ambition is different. For literary reasons, which I shall refer to later, for reasons of another kind—which are obvious [1]—I believe it to be advisable to bring these two countries nearer to each other by intellectual interchanges. Between two peoples, as between two individuals, there can be no close and solid friendship until after they know each other's minds.

* * * * * *

I shall briefly describe Russia's literature with reference to its origin, its first poor results, its long servitude to foreign masters and its final emancipation.

In this century a small family of scribes develops into a large and powerful crowd. Their great number is as embarrassing to us now as was formerly their paucity. I

[1] The author married a Russian.—(Tr.)

shall therefore select a few only, who will be characteristic of the mass. This method is all the more justifiable in Russia, because in that young nation, hardly educated and where all are on the same level, the differences among individuals are less pronounced. You may travel through a hundred villages between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and you will find the same characteristics, the same dress and outward appearances; all exactly alike as if belonging to the same world. . . . It is the same with their "souls"; one single mind is more representative of the minds of the mass than with us. . . . It would be monotonous to give more than a few examples.

The first part of this study is confined to the four prominent contemporary romancers, who have already received attention in Europe. These four are beyond comparison the best types and will afford us a good summary of the national genius. I have endeavoured, when dealing with them, to set forth the man himself as well as his work—and in this combination present the best expression of their country's social standing. Art has its own interests and greatness. But these become doubly valuable when they contain the secret by which I am able to pursue the riddle of Russia, at all times mysterious.

* * * * * *

I shall also compare the Russian writers with those of other countries more familiar to us. Not from a desire to display my own knowledge—for I well know how dangerous and lame these analogies often are—but to give us a knowledge of what is not as yet generally known, and for this there is no better method than by making comparisons with what we do know. . . .

Some may express astonishment at my hope of finding the solution of Russia's secret from these writers. For reasons which will appear anon, philosophy, history, the eloquence of the desk, whether professional or official—I will not add of the judiciary—are almost entirely absent

in this youthful literature. All these subjects which in other countries are found under authorized and stereotyped forms are, in Russia, only to be discovered in the mass of poesy and romance affording the only available ground for their growth, and the expansion of the national spirit, because of the till lately "impossible" system of censorship, and which to-day even is hardly bearable. Ideas can only filter through its meshes in the disguised form of fiction. In that form can all pass through, and fiction thus assumes the importance of an educational doctrine.

Of the two royal roads to learning, one such—poesy—was in full force at the beginning of the century; the other—the novel—has suppressed the former and monopolized the last forty years.

Dominated and led by the great name of Pushkin, the Russians consider the period of "romance" as their intellectual zenith. At first I thought the same, and made poesy the first object of my studies. But two strong reasons made me change my opinion. On the one hand, it struck me as foolish to write about works that for me did not exist. The Russian poets are not translated and never will be. A lyrical poem is a living being of furtive creation, existing only in the arrangements of phrases and words; such a being cannot exist in a body clothed in a foreign tongue.

Only the other day I was reading an exact and appropriate Russian translation of Musset's *Les Nuits*. It gave me the same pleasure as that derived from seeing the corpse of a beautiful woman. The soul had departed, as had also the aroma of the beautiful words that were its chief value. The difficulty increases when translating idioms and metaphors common to the most poetic language in Europe into that which is the least so. Certain verses of Pushkin's and Lermontoff's are the finest I know of in the whole world. But they are silly nonsense when clothed in the faded rags of prose. It has been attempted,

and the attempts will continue, but it is not worth the effort.

Moreover, I do not think that romantic poesy is the most original manifestation of the Russian spirit. . . . In giving it the first place in the history of their literature, the critics of that country are led away by the magic spell of the past and by the enthusiasm of a rising generation. Time falsifies its value to the detriment of the present, for it magnifies all that is venerable and remote. A stranger is therefore perhaps in a better position to estimate the judgment of the future.

In adjusting the relative values of their literature in this century, I think that the great novelists of the last forty years will serve Russia better than her poets. With them she has for the first time passed in front of the West instead of following her. She has at last found an æstheticism and shades of thought which are her own. That is what decided me to look for the special Russian characteristics in their novels.

* * * * * *

Ten years of hard study of the Russian genius have enabled me to form an opinion of its peculiar characteristics, and the part it plays in the present struggles of the human mind generally. As the novel explains all the problems of their national life, one must not be astonished that I refer to light fiction for collecting information on the more serious subjects. We shall see the Russians plead the cause of realism, with new arguments in my opinion even better than those current among the elder rivals of the West. This is an important process, for, at this moment it is at the back of all the literary differences in the civilized world. Under the colour of literature it reveals the most essential conceptions among our contemporaries. Before introducing the Russian writers as principals in this process I would like first to resume the argument unhampered and in all sincerity.

I

Classic literature contemplated man as being at the summit of humanity, in the transports of great passions, and was used as a protagonist in a noble but simple drama. The actors were given parts embodying virtue or wickedness, happiness or suffering; all conforming to the highest ideals and absolute requirements of an exalted life. Man, in the classics, was a hero, and his part was in harmony with all the circumstances of social life as they knew it in early times, exemplifying, as a rule, whether for good or evil, what man should be, rather than what he actually was.

Since last century, almost insensibly, other views prevailed. Man is observed more in the position he actually holds in the world, in his daily life and habits. Jealous of the strict artificial method, the writer proposes to educate us by an analysis of sentiments and acts, rather than amuse or move us by a plot or scenes of passion.

Classic art imitated the methods of a king who ruled, punished, rewarded, chose his friends from among the best of the aristocracy and imposed on them the obligations of all the virtues. Modern art seeks to imitate unconscious nature, indifferent morality and its fatalistic preordination. . . . It expresses the triumph of collectivism over individualism, of the crowd over the hero, of the relative over the absolute. It is now called realism, naturalism. Might it not be permitted to be called republicanism?

It would be too shortsighted to look no further than this apparent cause of this change in literature. Political changes are but mere episodes in the great changes of the world. . . . By dint of work man explains the universe to himself. He has noticed that existence, with all its greatness or unhappiness, is made up of incessant hard labour and of infinitesimally small things. As the Government of States was handed over to the multitude, so

science found the laws of the universe to be a matter of atoms. . . .

Everywhere, the analysis of physical and moral phenomena has abolished the ancient belief as to the great changes. The rough-and-ready effects due to powerful upheavals which hitherto explained the world's revolutions and the soul's development gave way to a belief in nebulous microbic evolution.

The modern spirit seemed to be standing on the top of a pinnacle. The slightest movement inevitably caused it to slide down the slope.

Are they in search of the First Cause of creation? It is now no longer the Great Work of a six-day creation, by a sudden demiurge. No. A vapour solidifies; a few drops of water; molecules slowly agglomerating during myriads of centuries—that is the beginning of the planets! And the beginning of life is the gentle breath of things without a name swarming in a flake of mud! . . .

Is it a question of explaining the successive transformations of the terrestrial globe? The volcanoes, the deluges, the great cataclysms have but performed a feeble part, for that is the work of the unknown and impeccable—the grain of sand deposited by water during days without end, the coral reef which in time becomes a continent!

* * * * * *

In the same way were the secrets of the soul studied. The human ego seemed to be but the agglomeration of a long line of sensations and actions, always acted upon by its surroundings.

* * * * * *

Literature, but a record of the world's doings, could not of course remain uninfluenced by the general and sudden change. First by instinct, then by design, she modified her methods to suit the new spirit of the age. Her first attempts were clumsy, unsuccessful, even futile. It must be understood to-day that romantism was then a bastard

product. It breathed rebellion, which is not a state favourable to remaining as calm and strong as nature. Its reaction against the classical hero made it find its characters among the lower orders; but as it was unconsciously still imbued with the classic spirit, the monsters they invented were no more than inverted heroes. Their convicts, their courtesans and their beggars were more inflated and shallower than the kings and princesses of the olden days. The subject for declamation had changed, but not the manner of declamation. One soon became tired of it, and the demand for more real and sincere representations, more in accordance with the positive science of the day, increased. People demanded to be told about the sentiments of complex life, about beings, ideas and their relations to each other as they really were. Hence realism. It at once took hold of all European literature, and rules to this day in the different ways we are about to consider.

The literary form was dictated by the universal revolution just referred to, but a search for the reasons which gave rise to the change would necessarily be found in the field of philosophy.

What were these reasons? Some people in France with silly self-conceit imagined that these great mutations of the soul were due to the writings of certain philosophers who wrote the *Encyclopædia*, or to some others who took the Bastille, and so forth. It was thought that reason, now emancipated, had alone performed the miracle and had displaced the world's axis. The self-satisfaction of the man of this century was, however, excusable. By a two-fold and magnificent effort, his intelligence has solved most of nature's problems—and by his own will has freed himself from most of the social conditions that weighed him down. A rational understanding of the universe seemed now clear to him. He had reduced it to its primary elements, and had found the laws of generation, but having

at the same time procured his own personal freedom in this science-ridden world, man believed himself destined to know everything and do everything.

Formerly man's domain was limited to a small area surrounded by an immense mysterious zone which in his ignorance he thought contained all that thwarted his reason, and all his hopes. This belt of darkness, sewn with stars, now penetrated by him, was rolled back, and man decided henceforth to ignore it.

In explaining these new ideas and life generally, all the old ideas referring to this hitherto unknown region were eliminated, in other words everything that appertained to the "Order Divine." The new science was incompatible with the crude anthropomorphic ideas of our ancestors, relating to the creation, the history of man, and the relation between God and man. All religious sentiments were explained by and attributed to natural causes. Moreover, why look for unknown causes when the functions of the Heavens and the Earth were so clear to the men of science? What the need of a master up there, when there were so many here below? God's least crime was that of being useless! So it was demonstrated by the greater minds and the lesser felt persuaded. The eighteenth century had inaugurated the cult of reason. The millennium had arrived—for a while.

Then came the inevitable disillusion, and the usual ruin of what man had built on his paltry and shallow reason. For one thing he learnt that whilst extending his field of research and acquiring knowledge, he came to realize that his ignorance grew in the same proportion. Next, experience taught him that political emancipation did not give him the expected liberty because of crushing economic laws. Whether a royal subject or a republican freeman he found himself remaining the wretched slave to his passions and all his aspirations checked by material want. He learnt that the most glorious charter could not remove

the slightest misery or feed the hungry. His extravagant presumptions then vanished. He saw himself returned to his eternal lot, better educated and equipped no doubt, but—where was the advantage? Nature, he learnt, holds the balance between our acquirements and our needs, and ever brings them to the level. Disenchanted, man then returned to his former instincts of appealing to a superhuman Power. But there was none. He had abolished it.

Arrogance of reason, gloom of orthodoxy and everything else seemed to conspire to make the break with the past irremediable. . . . All the wise men having declared that science had proved the futility of religion—as regards the explanation of origin and creation—proud reason declined to recede from its position.

The defenders of the Faith failed to make matters easier. They did not realize that after all their doctrines held the source of all progress, and that by fighting science and political development at every point they deflected the natural direction of that source. In their anxiety to keep intact the trust transmitted to them the orthodox seldom perceive all the force and the subtleties of the principles they defend. They become frightened when the vital principle sets to work to transform the world according to a scheme that has escaped them. They feel like the man whose wooden post of his house, full of sap, throws out branches and threatens to bring down his roof. The best of sound doctrine is to see if it can accommodate itself to human necessities, without losing any part of its essential truth. Failing this gift there is no reason for its existence.

For a long time, eighteen centuries, no less, orthodoxy proclaimed the simple resultant truth of the Gospel as being a Triumphant Second Advent. . . . Reason was all along being undermined by this belief. Bossuet wrote, "Jesus Christ appeared to overcome the pride

of reason, hence its policy is opposed to that of the age." [1]

All the great efforts of our times have been predicted and ruled by the words: *Misereor super turbam.* This drop of mercy, falling on the miseries of the old world, has softened our natures and evolved modern man, giving him new conceptions of morality, æstheticism, politics and compassion. But this evangelical influence on the past is by some denied to-day. To such this is like a belated traveller going East. In front of him night becomes darker; the only light is that fading on the well-beaten track behind him.

Moreover, the apparent contradictions of science and religion were too strong. On the one hand the narrow interpretation placed on the New Testament—which might be called Judaic—and on the other the seeming revolt against it, but which was in reality a development of the Christian teaching. . . . Time was needed for a full appreciation of cause and effect. To-day its truths are in the air, so to speak, and there is no need to press this fact on my readers.

They had to be referred to, however, to explain the spirit which animated, and only can excuse, realism the harshness of its methods. By strictly studying life as it is, to the very roots, it fulfils an important duty, but it insults and deceives our innate instincts when it ignores the possibility of a Divine Power governing and directing what is beyond our understanding. I would wish realism to assert nothing about the unknown world; it should at least "fear to tread" when nearing it. Just because it prides itself in observing phenomena without arbitrary suggestions as to their causes, it should accept as good evidence the obvious fact of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men all around us to-day. It is, of all arts, most in need of the religious sentiment, for this gives it

[1] Sermon, 1659, on the Dignity of Poverty.

the charity of which it is in need. As it does not recoil from the hideousness of misery it must relieve it by compassion or realism becomes odious. But, as we shall show presently, the moment compassion does not flow from its original and righteous source, it leads literature astray.

I am quite aware that by demanding a moral lesson from the scribe I shall bring a smile on the lips of many who maintain the honoured doctrine of "Art for Art." I confess I do not subscribe to this dictum, at least not in the sense as understood in these days. Certainly morality and beauty are synonymous terms in art. One of Virgil's cantos is worth a whole chapter of Tacitus. But, and this is my point, it is wrong to confound spiritual beauty, due to a special "illumination" possessed by an artist, with mere technical trickery. I will never admit that serious-minded men, mindful of their own dignity and public esteem, will condescend to the use of outlandish acrobatic feats.

These fastidious people are very singular. They profess to despise the ordinary writer whose object is to teach and console humanity, yet they condescend to "turn a wheel" before their audience for the sole purpose of showing off their own agility. Instead of excusing themselves they vaunt their inability to "tell" them anything. . . .

To resume the subject of what realism should be. I am in search of a formula which would at the same time express my idea of its method and of its power of creation. I can only find one, and that an old one. But I know of none better, none more scientific and which so pithily reveals the secret of all creations. "And the Lord God formed man of the slime (sic) of the ground."

See how just and significant is this word—slime! Without prejudice as to other details given it contains all that we know of the origin of life. . . . Yes, but slime in itself is not sufficient to solve the mystery of life. It is not "I." . . . It must also contain what we shall never

know, however much we may study it. . . . We must complete the text of our formula to explain the duality of our nature. . . . "And inspired him with the breath of life, and man became a living soul."

This is the "breath," from the source of universal life, the spirit, the certain yet incomprehensible element that moves us, which surrounds us, which disconcerts all our own explanations of things, and without which they will ever be deemed insufficient. As to the slime, it is the material substance which is taken for the universe—in our laboratories, and for man—in our surgeries. It reveals much, but as they cannot bring in the "breath"—the creation of a "living soul" has not been achieved, for "life" begins only at the point where we cease to understand.

The creator of literature must adopt the same method. Has realism conformed to it in the literature which it creates?

II

(*Part II has been omitted, as it has an interest for French critics only.*—Tr.)

III

At the time when realism was with difficulty taking root in France it had already conquered the two great literatures of England and Russia. There, the soul was ready to receive it, and everything favoured its growth. We, and all our racial brethren have inherited from our Latin masters the genius for the absolute. The northern races, Slav or Anglo-Saxon, have the genius for the relative. This division of the European family, as can be seen right through history, applies also to religious beliefs, to principles of justice, and to literary methods.

In contrast to our own swift and clear spirit always occupied in adhering strictly to the limits imposed by the field of study, theirs is wide and restless, because it sees much at the same time. It does not possess our classical training, which permits of our isolating a single fact, or character, and in that character a single passion, and to supply in a thousand ways all that is not self-evident. It deems that the representation of daily life should be as complex and contradictory as life itself. It would consider it a slur on its good faith if any part of the whole, and what is necessary to it, should remain unrevealed. Note how different the dramatic compositions are. In ours, there is a central figure, a few secondary characters and the action vigorously defined, *e. g. Le Cid, Phèdre, Zaïre.* In the English or German tragedies there is usually a tumultuous multitude, if we may say so, rushing after each other without any dressing or omissions of the successive events in a part out of general history—as, for example, *Henry VI, Richard III, Wallenstein.* It is the same in their romances. Their patient readers do not expect to be saddled with a flowery novel stuffed with philosophy and ideas which make as great a demand on the intelligence as any purely scientific book.

Nevertheless, the chief difference between our realism and that of the northern people must be sought for elsewhere. We shall find it to be due more to ethical inspirations than to æsthetic divergencies. On that point all critics are agreed.

Taine, speaking of Stendhal and of Balzac, when comparing them with Dickens, writes : " They love their art better than men . . . they do not write out of sympathy with the poor, but to show off their style." [1] That's it in a nutshell. And the distinction becomes more evident the more we study our present-day realists and those writers who have come after Dickens, as also the Russians.

[1] *Littérature anglaise* : " Dickens."

Montégut goes further in his criticism on George Eliot. Referring to former works, he sums it up in one phrase, with which I am in full accord : " It is to its religious foundation that I attribute the high moral tone which has ever distinguished the English novel, even in the most audacious or cynical productions. I have always contended that realism was perfectly acceptable when imbued with that spirit, but deprived of that it can only produce what is inferior, puerile and immoral. I have never ceased from holding that opinion." Brunetière, also with George Eliot in mind, writes : " It is certain, as I have already demonstrated, that any hostile, ironic, or at least jeering remark indulged in by our French realists is only skin deep, whereas there is no corner of the human heart that the English realists have not penetrated into. Do not take any time or trouble to find the reason for this elsewhere, for it is within. Indeed that sympathy—not the commonplace sympathy which brought tears into the eyes of the proverbial rich man weeping over *Holophernes*—but the intelligent sympathy enlightened by love, which descends gently without ostentation and is ever at the disposal of those who wish to understand her. Such is, such has always been, and always will be the proper instrument for all true psychological analysis." [1]

I have been at pains to make these quotations because they apply equally well to Russian realism as to English realism.

I shall not say anything more about the latter. Taine, Montégut and Scherer, to mention only these few, have exhausted this subject in France. But I may add England retains the honour of having introduced and carried to perfection the kind of art which is demanded by the new spirit all over Europe.

Realism, begun by Richardson, followed by Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, now entered upon its most

[1] *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1883) : " George Eliot."

glorious stages. At the time when Flaubert's waning intellect was introducing it into France, Eliot was already exemplifying its use in an unequalled manner in England. Notwithstanding my liking for Turgeneff and Tolstoy, I would possibly prefer that enchantress, Mary Evans; and if a hundred years hence novels of the past are read, I feel sure our grandchildren's choice would incline towards those three.

Without doubt we must admire the English method of slow development, for as with life, realism demands a patient preparation for the fullest enjoyment of its pleasures. One has to resign oneself to reading a whole volume about the education of two children, as in *The Tulliver Family*, before we can understand little Maggie. Reading these books, one feels as if following a limpid stream and insensibly getting into deep waters. There is nothing special about it, and it is like any other water, but suddenly with a little shiver of delight you realize that you are plunged into the ocean. Take *Adam Bede* or *Silas Marner*, for instance. One may read page after page, and find but plain words relating to simple facts. You could have written them yourself; so could I. But, I ask myself, what on earth have I to do with these people? Then, for no reason, without any tragic event to move one, but by mere force of the invisible majesty of the work which has been accumulating during the last hour, suddenly a tear drops on the book. I defy anybody to explain it, beyond that it is beautiful as if God were speaking to us. No less.

It is indeed as beautiful as the Bible. The meeting between Dinah and Lisbeth, as well as twenty other passages, might have been written by the same hand that gave us *Ruth*. One realizes how the Bible has penetrated England to the very marrow. It is apparent, also, how deeply race and climate and education influenced George Eliot. One of course knows that her views are not con-

ventional, and for herself she has thrown over the old faith, but never mind, she has it in her blood, "that primary religious drop which was deposited by Protestantism in every English mind, and to which must be attributed the superiority of the English novel to ours." [1]

The same phenomenon is to be seen among the Russian writers. Individually free from all Christian dogma, they conspicuously retain its influence, and in their writings we seem to hear the chimes of the Temple bells, even when ringing out for things secular and profane. . . . The scribe's momentary religious views have often but little influence on his writings. What is of value, and which is conspicuous by its absence with us, is the training of infancy in healthy moral surroundings, which gives a religious quality of the heart. Wherever Mary Evans' own views may lead her, she will always be able to apply to herself the words of Dinah Morris, which contain the essence of her creed: "I think there is no room in my heart for any anxieties about myself as long as it pleases God to fill my heart abundantly with compassion for the suffering of the poor who also belong to Him."

Thus think and speak many of the Russian writers who are at this time challenging the supremacy of the English realistic novel. Their appearance in this great literary sphere was sudden and unexpected. Till lately the study of these Slavonic writings was entrusted by us to a few oriental scholars.[2] It was suspected that they too might have a literature of their own just as have the Persians or the Arabs. Their reports, however, were unfavourable. Mérimée was the first to recognize the possibilities of this little-known country and had remarked upon some writers of talent and originality. Turgeneff appeared amongst

[1] Montégut, *loc. cit.*

[2] To this day "Russian" belongs to the Oriental group of languages in the French Acadamies, just as in our Universities Latin and Greek are still "modern languages"; but with better reason.—Tr.

us as the pioneer missionary of the Russian genius, and in himself showed the high value of that same genius. But the Western public remained sceptical. French opinion about Russia was then expressed in one of those neat phrases, with which we crush a nation as readily as an individual : " A nation prematurely rotten "—and that covered everything. The Russians could have little to say against us, for, as we shall presently see, some of the most conspicuous among them have applied this same phrase to themselves. May we be kept from hasty judgments ! Do we recollect that Mirabeau used the same words when speaking about Prussia ? In his *Secret History* he wrote: " Rottenness before Maturity ! I much fear that that is the proper motto for the Prussian power." Subsequent events showed that his fears were unnecessary.

In the same way J. J. Rousseau, when writing about Russia in the *Contrat Social*, had not missed an opportunity for making a paradox. " The Russian Empire desires to conquer Europe, but will itself be humbled. Her subjects or neighbours the Tartars, will become her masters and ours also. This event appears to me inevitable." Ségur, with greater personal experience, said with more justice : " The Russians are still what they have been made. Some day becoming free, they will know themselves."

That day, still future in other respects, has arrived as regards Russian literature, and long before Europe deigned to admit it. In 1840, a school arose which called itself " The Natural School "—or " naturalistic "—for the Russian word bears both meanings—and absorbed all the native talent. It devoted itself to the novel and at once produced some remarkable books. It reminds one of the English school and owes much to Dickens and but little to Balzac, whose fame had not got abroad. It outstripped our own realism, such as Flaubert had made it later on. Some of these Russians from the first adopted

the vein of distress and despair we took later on, with much difficulty. If there is any virtue in that, then they at least had the merit of priority. But other Russian writers soon disentangled themselves from these excesses, and like the English gave realism a superior beauty moved by the same moral spirit of a compassion, cleansed of all impurities and glorified by the spirit of the Gospels.

They have not got the same intellectual grasp, or the virile force of the Anglo-Saxon, that race of granite, always sure of itself, and ruling itself as it "rules the waves." The buoyant Russian spirit, drifting through all kinds of philosophies and errors, has come at last to anchor in the stormy sea of Nihilism and pessimism. A superficial reader might well confound Tolstoy and Flaubert. But this Nihilism is never taken apart from revolt, that soul is never impenitent, it is continually groaning and searching, but finally reasserts itself under the influence of charity—a charity more or less actively employed by Turgeneff and Tolstoy but unrestrained in Dostoyevsky, to the point of becoming painful. They air all the doctrines brought from abroad, whether sceptical, fatalistic or positivist, but from the outset, in their innermost hearts, they ever remain the kind of Christians of whom once an eloquent voice said : "They cease not their sympathy with groaning creation and the tears by which men and things at all times sustain the endless flood." In reading their most weird books one can feel the existence of another book which affects all their writings. It is the venerable volume which is given the place of honour in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg—the New Testament translated by Ostromir of Novgorod (1056). In the centre of recent national publications this volume symbolizes the source of their inspiration.

Next to human sympathy, the chief characteristic of these realists is their knowledge of the lower classes, and their circumstances, which are detailed to an extent and

obvious relish previously unknown. Nevertheless the invisible is not neglected. Their characters are anxious about the universal mystery, and however much the characters seem to be engaged with the dramatic events of the moment, they ever lend an ear to the murmurings of abstract thought. In the creations of Turgeneff, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky these are never absent from their minds.

As with their inspirations, their literary methods are similar to the English. The interest and emotions of both have to be purchased by patience. At first the seeming absence of plot or specific action, and the tax on our memory of these Russian efforts puzzles and tries us. Their own lazy and dreamy character, delay at very step to occupy themselves with unnecessary detail, which obscures the whole. These are made too important and too far-fetched for our taste. . . . The Russian words measure as many yards as ours do feet. . . . Nevertheless one is charmed with the unexpected combination of their native simplicity and their mode of psychological analysis. . . . The delineation of the human heart is marvellously detailed such as I have never yet met with.

As nearly all these Russian writers belong to the better class, we find for the first time the customs and manners of the best society faithfully described. But on leaving Court circles, these otherwise faultless observers make the peasant speak in the same language though without once disguising his real thoughts. By the simple merits of naturalness and sentiment the realist Tolstoy, like George Eliot, turns the most commonplace stories into the form of a calm epic, and equally fascinating. We salute him as probably the greatest demonstrator of life which has arisen since Goethe.

I shall not say more on this subject just now as I have to refer to it later on when analysing each writer, but in the above brief summary I purposed merely to show the bond

that existed between the English and Russian realism, and in how much they differ from ours. Also, to explain how this form of art, often unjustly decried, was able in other countries to produce masterpieces the moment they came in contact with the source of all force, a glow of light and heat. For literature acts in the same way as does the hearth fire, in virtue of the sovereign law which rules both in the physical and the moral world, by turning into " power " all she receives from light and heat, and gives out one in the same measure she receives the other. Why we have failed and the English and Russian succeeded is because they have applied the formula of creation in its entirety. They take man out of the slime, but animate him with the breath of life and make out of both " a living soul."

It is on this account that their literature has gradually taken hold of the European mind. It responds to every exigency of life, the needs of the human soul, and is in a form acceptable to the spirit of the age, already referred to.

This ought to give us food for reflection. Thanks to the increased means of all kinds of exchange, thanks to the growing spirit of unity in the world, there is formed to-day, over and above the racial and national limitations, a European spirit based on culture, ideas and sympathy common to all intelligent people. Just as their dress is almost identical, one finds the influence of the same spirit in London, St. Petersburg, Rome or Berlin—further still, even on the ocean steamers on the Pacific, in the prairies being subdued by emigrants and in the merchants' counting-houses in the Antipodes.

That spirit has passed us over. The philosophies and literatures of our rivals are slowly but surely on their way triumphant. That spirit is no longer ours. We do not impart it, we follow in its wake, with occasional success, perhaps, but following is not leading. I am well aware

that our enormous production of romantic literature may still boast of being supreme on the shelves where books are offered for sale. They are fashionable, and at times amusing, but, with a few and notable exceptions, the book which enlivens and nourishes the mind, which is taken seriously, which is read out aloud in the home, and which after all fashions the intelligence, does not come from Paris. I maintain with regret, and heartily wishing to be proved wrong, that the result of my long experience in foreign countries justifies me in recording my opinion, that the thoughts and ideas which are remodelling Europe no longer spring from the mind of France. As unfortunate as our politics, which deprived us of our material world Empire, our literature has by its innate deficiencies also lost us the Empire of the intellectual worlds which at one time was our unchallenged inheritance.

IV

It may well be believed that in making this comparison I am not seeking the infamous pleasure of disparaging my own country. If I thought that this momentary decadence was irremediable I should remain silent. I speak frankly because to-day more than ever I am persuaded to the contrary. After the Great Calamity (1870–71) it was thought that the French spirit would suddenly change and that literature would bear witness to that change. This view showed a poor knowledge of human nature, which invariably moves slowly. Turn to the Muse of the years which succeeded the terrible events of the Revolution. She languished awhile, but on all points remained the same as she was on the eve of that drama. For her the world had not moved. Chateaubriand enters the scene six years after the days of Terror, but only as a striking exception, for it is not until twenty years have

passed that the important literary revival commenced by which to gauge any changes in the French intellectual spirit. It shows us that the catastrophies have had but little instructive or modifying effect on the minds already matured. These recovered themselves the next day, with their wonted animation, prejudices and customary habits. But these catastrophies make an inexpressible impression on the tender imaginations of the children. They appeared exaggerated to their beautiful and astonished eyes, where every scene appears magnified. These little ones grow into men and one recognizes in them the children of the Tempest.[1]

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And so it would seem to be at this time. In the last fifteen years we have but turned round in the old bed in which we received our wound, we have been kept alive by the old formulas, and literature has not changed its recipes. One could well believe that nobody asked for or desired more wholesome food. But that is an error, as those know best who look at the rising generation. This is not to be judged by a few noisy and quaint efforts. A new spirit is working among the more educated who are looking round in the world for a new fulcrum—a new spirit that is disgusted with all that is placed before it. The dying gasps of idealistic art is no more welcome. Deaf to the gentle dying murmurs of the passing things, it turns away from the fiction that charmed a former generation. No less is it a rebellion against the materialistic literature on a purely mundane plane. Neither " musk nor dung," but " fresh air " is the new device. Its innate generosity is repulsed by the egoistical detachment and the intolerable staleness of the realism suggested. The brutal negation of positivism does not satisfy it. . . .

Should the need of a change in the matter of religious views, in literature, be pointed out, this new spirit will

[1] The events immediately following the war of 1870–71.

listen with interest, without prejudice or hatred, for in the absence of faith, mysticism is its all in all. This fact is its chief characteristic. It is reproached for its pessimism, and yet nothing is offered it to cure the evil. These pessimists are like souls fluttering round the lamp of Truth. . . .

Yet if we turn to Ségur's Memoirs we find that the pessimist of to-day is exactly the pessimist of yesterday. . . . But one of the most striking things I have noticed is the greediness with which modern youth is grasping at the new fruit. . . . Pushkin somewhere calls translators "The post-horses of civilization." One could hardly describe their function better. The first to translate Russian works could never have realized the useful work they were undertaking. . . . I trust their labours will continue.

An attempt has been made to attribute the success of the Russians to the caprice of fashion and infatuation. But what a superficial view to take! I admit that there might have been a little of "fashion" about it—every tree has its parasite—and that infatuation did exist in some social quarters. But the Russian Novel has taken deep root in the minds of studious youth in every condition of life, which has been fascinated not by its local colour or its foreign savour, but by the "breath of life," the sincerity and compassion which animates all these books. That youth found in them the intellectual food it was craving for and which our fanciful literature does not provide any more, and as they were famished they enjoyed the feast prepared for them. I am not writing at random, for I could refer to many letters from young men, known and unknown to me, in support of my contention.

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I am convinced that the influence of the greater Russian writers will be beneficial to our exhausted art. It may assist her to once more observe the facts of life, to look

beyond, and recover its influence. Already some novels show a better moral tendency.

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When the Great Century began French literature was being agonized by the quips and pranks of the Rambouillet Palace, then Corneille brought his stock from Spain and Molière his from Italy. We were at that time sane and in splendid health and lived on ourselves for two hundred years. With the nineteenth century other needs arose and the national reserves were once more at a low ebb. We borrowed from England and Germany. Then once more literature was set afloat and passed through the well-known and beautiful period of revival. Now, because of the Russians' success, we arrive again at a time of famine and mental anæmia. If we are still able to digest, we shall renew our blood at their expense. Should there be any found to blush at owing anything to the " Barbarians," let us remind them that the world of intellect is a vast society for mutual help and charitable acts.

The Koran contains a beautiful saying: " How shall we know that the end of the world has come? " asks the Prophet.

" It is when one soul can no more help another," was the answer. Pray Heaven that the Russian soul may yet do much for ours!

In this study of the Russian spirit it may seem that I have chiefly referred to our French literature. It is a fact I do not regret. During the years passed over yonder, spent in gathering their ideas, listening to their vague, musical language, veiling the most subtle thought, I constantly dreamt of what I could bring back from there wherewith to enrich our own ideas, and our ancient language formed and fashioned by our forefathers of long ago. They have placed the whole world under contribution for the adorning of their Queen—literature and speech. They

knew that in her service anything is permissible, that the passers-by may be fleeced, the privateer armed, the seas watched and scoured.

Let us imitate them. But some of our wise men pretend that French thought has but to run round the globe to see itself everywhere reflected in a Parisian mirror. Others affirm that henceforth our language must be an impersonal voice belonging to no one epoch in particular, a universal speech to be worked at bit by bit, and like the mosaics made of hard cold bits of stone which the descendants of Raphael put together for sale to the Americans. Poor Language! I once thought that centuries had smelted them in a furnace as a bell to send forth its chimes all round the earth, and that to make it stronger and more sonorous its hollow was filled with the laughter, the anger, the loves, the despair, the whole soul of language and thought of such mighty workmen as Rabelais, Pascal, Saint-Simon, Mirabeau, Chateaubriand, Michelet!

But I now see that every epoch must re-smelt them without remorse. Now has the time come to begin and restore what has been allowed to fade. Let us set to work and re-fashion them even as that Corinthian "metal" which came forth from defeat and flames enriched by the whole world's treasures, by all the relic of the patriotic past enriched by its ruins and its misfortunes—bright and ringing metal good for forging jewels and daggers.

E. M. DE VOGÜÉ.

Paris, May 1886.

THE RUSSIAN NOVEL

CHAPTER I

ITS ORIGIN—THE MIDDLE PERIOD—THE CLASSIC PERIOD

Before studying the contemporary authors who would naturally reveal to us the actual characteristics of the Russian genius of to-day, it is indispensable that a moment's thought should be devoted to their predecessors. A glance at the long childhood of that literature will help us perhaps to understand the position it holds to-day.[1] In our brief inquiry into its past we will particularly look for that which has paved the way to the present. I will endeavour to show how everything in the past really thwarted its humble growth and retarded its coming to maturity.

Russian literature can be divided into four distinct periods. The first ending with the reign of Peter the Great, may be considered the Middle Ages of that country, a period of barbaric first attempts and of popular poesy, during which time the foundations of the national traditions were being laid. The second period embraces the last century, from the day of " The Reformer " up to the reign of Alexander I. This is the most sterile, notwithstanding its assumed air of superiority over the preceding one. It is chiefly remarkable for its literature being a servile imitation of that of the West. The third period, full of romanticism, offers us in a short space of time a brilliant selection of poesy. The general history of literature takes count of these delightful blossoms; but they are as yet

[1] 1886.

only hothouse growths, the product of an imported culture They but imperfectly teach us the native qualities inherent in Russian soil.

Forty years ago, a fourth period may be said to have commenced. Since then Russia has indeed given forth something original and spontaneous. With the realistic novel, the national spirit has become conscious of its own entity, for it strikes back to the popular roots of the past, and now stammers its conceptions of the future.

Let us, then, study this genius come forth out of primitive darkness and risen from the very foundations of history—yet always compromised by the cruelty of that same history and ever disconcerted by its frequent sudden reversals. But first let us remind ourselves of the intellectual origin, as also the ethical wanderings of the race. We shall then be better able to sympathize with all that its literature contains of sadness, of confusion, of indefiniteness.

I

It is at once discovered that the Russian people are victims of "historic sufferings" partly due to an inherited evil derived from their earliest ancestors, partly in consequence of what they have themselves contracted since. The evil inherited from the most ancient sources is the tendency of the Slav spirit towards that negative doctrine which we to-day call "Nihilism," and which holds exactly the same meaning as the word "Nirvana" among the Hindoos. To know Russia well, all that has once been learnt about ancient India must be recalled to mind. This view may appear to the French reader as too novel for immediate acceptation. But it is a fact familiar to scholars in Russia, where some philosophers openly avow adherence to the Buddhist faith and proudly vaunt the purity of their Arian blood. It is not an uncommon event to hear a

savant of that country say to a stranger—with a certain amount of presumption—" You will never understand the true spirit of the Arian as well as we do; you are no more than their distant cousins—we are their direct descendants."

Those who speak thus are not in want of argument in support of their idea. To begin with, they possess a physical type which has remained perfectly pure in all the families that have not mixed with the Tartar blood. Many a Moscow student, many a peasant in some of the provinces, could pass down the streets of Lahore or of Benares with nothing, save their complexion, to distinguish them from the natives of the Gangetic valley. The similarity of their languages is striking. Were one to classify the Indo-European languages in accordance with their degree of affinity to the Sanscrit, the Slavic dialect would occupy a place of its own, much nearer to the mother tongue than to any other, even than its sister language. The tables of comparisons drawn up by linguists who are the recognized authorities in these matters acknowledge that a far closer connection exists between the ancient Slav and the Sanscrit than between the latter and the most ancient Greek. The roots in most of the commonest words show but slight differences, and the rules of grammar are precisely the same. Cite the *Vedas* to any Russian peasant, and he will understand without further explanation. The verb *Vedat*[1] is one in common use. If he asks for fire he will use the primordial word, the same, indeed, as that used by his ancestors when worshipping it. One could accumulate the examples, and could prove the connection still more precisely from the syntax ruling each language; but these philologic deductions are even less decisive than those deducible from a study of the Russian character itself.

If it is admitted that certain types of intellectuality are

[1] *Vedat*, to know. Fire: in Sanscrit, *agni*; in Russian, *ognia* (in the oblique case).

observable in the different races of the human family, it can easily be shown that the intellect of the Slav is a survival of that of the Hindoo. I shall have occasion to return to this contention when dealing with the religious and moral state of the Russian people. If, however, one accepts the statement as well founded, a study of the revolutions in India will give us the key wherewith to understand the historical transformations in Russia. Question the most competent writers, like Burnouf, Max Müller, as to the nature of the Buddhist revolution. They would answer that it was an upheaval more social than religious; a popular rising against caste, against the narrow and harsh organization of a society as established by the Brahmins. What Christianity has done for the West, Buddhism has done for the Far East. By their revelation of charity, gentleness, spiritual and social freedom, they render life to the multitude of human beings, of people weighed down under the yoke of a pitiless theocracy, more bearable.

To be successful, the best theological doctrines must admit of a certain amount of elasticity, whereby to meet the varying racial imperfections. They should be adapted to the idiosyncrasies which have affected an imagination warped by long periods of suffering. To the latter Christianity offered asceticism, to Buddhism, the joys of annihilation—Nirvana.

It is Burnouf, I believe, who invented the word "Nihilism" as a proper translation. If a more precise definition of Nirvana is desired, we may turn to Max Müller, who tells us that its real meaning is contained in the thought accompanying the act of blowing out the flame of a candle. Is this definition not exactly applicable to the Russians' idea of Nihilism? Is it not the flame of civilization that they wish to extinguish—to return to pure nothingness?

Doubtless numerous and more recent causes have aided in giving the national spirit this particular turn of dis-

couragement, which in the fiercer natures has developed into a fury for destroying all that exists—for everything that is bad. Christianity has formulated anew what was good in the ancient instincts; it has sunk deep down and is sufficient to explain the sentiments of fraternity and of self-denial, sentiments which are an honour to these people. Nevertheless I cannot help believing that one has to go back to the very far distant customs and trends of thought for the better understanding of the passions and the restlessness from which this conservative race suffers.

Let us now consider the series of accidents by which these primary conditions were aggravated or modified. I know of no nation whose destiny has been more frequently disturbed than Russia's. It resembles a flowing stream that, owing to violent upheavals, has several times changed its bed. Like one of those men who, having been ill-treated by fate, has put his hand to several different occupations, but has never been successful. The Western nations developed under far more favourable conditions. When the barbarians, after the recoil of Islam, had settled down, they had twelve centuries of comparative peace in which to work and to develop spontaneously. Revolutions and wars never completely threw them off the lines on which they had started. Russia, on the other hand, seems to have been the chosen field in which to make radical experiments. This process is accompanied with much oppression. Every two or three centuries, at the moment when these unfortunate people had settled on a certain line of progress, their course is headed and turned aside.

It makes one giddy when one realizes the disordered changes this great body of humanity was subjected to by sudden collisions with ideas and facts. Barbaric anarchy due to heathenism and intertribal wars continued in Russia for two or three centuries after they had ceased with us. Eventually Christianity appears, but from the Byzant,

a source the least pure, for it is a vitiated Christianity, enervated by that effete spirit which prevailed in the Eastern Empire. Those Slavs, Lithuanians, Finns have all now to become Greek in religion, legislature and government. They begin history anew.

Would it be possible for them to live and adapt themselves to the senile and exhausted traditions which were to supplant their old faith? Nevertheless these form the seed of life, and are the first pledge towards a fusion with the people of Europe, at this time the chosen leaders in human affairs. Will this germ have time to ripen?

Two hundred years after the "national baptisms" at Kieff, Russia was once more disturbed and submerged under the wave of a Mongolian invasion. It was the ebb-tide of an Asiatic overflow that seized its prey and fastened on the youngest of the Christian countries—one which had only just set her course towards Europe. The Tartars entering as heathens soon went over to Mohammedanism. They remained Asiatics, and forced oriental customs on their Russian subjects. No one has been a Tartar subject with impunity. Like the Bulgarians or the Armenians of modern Turkey, the peoples of the Golden Horn will for a long time yet carry in their hearts and minds the marks of the Tartar yoke.

In the fifteenth century, whilst for us the dawn of Renaissance was already shining, the Russians were only just commencing to shake off this yoke. A succession of noble efforts delivers them. Asia steps back, but slowly, for the Crescent does not disappear from the banks of the Volga till after 1550. But its spirit remains. The impress of orientalism will not fade away for some time yet. Russia left to herself, her people are now crushed by an iron despotism, an admixture of Mongol customs and Byzantine practices. Hardly emancipated from oppression by the foreigner, the masses are now bound to the soil.

On a certain inauspicious day, the day of St. George—of cursed memory to the peasant for three hundred years—Boris Godunoff by one stroke of the pen condemned them to serfdom, whereby all previous social conditions were once more changed. The next century was followed by a fresh invasion, this time from the West; the Poles occupied half Russia, and ruled at Moscow. They were in turn driven away, and then at last the nation could breathe freely again, and could once more look ahead. In which direction? Towards Europe, or towards Asia? Her traditions would incline her toward the latter. But she was once again to be forced out of her natural course. A rough pilot arose suddenly, and in a moment, with one brutal shove of his heavy pole, sent off this grand aimlessly floating raft into the current leading towards Europe.

With Peter the Great the moment arrived, when commenced perhaps the most singular and unquestionably the most abnormal attempts for experimenting with the historic development of a people. Continuing the above figure, imagine a ship in which the captain and his officers steer for the West and the crew set their sails for a wind that would carry them to the East. Such was the curious state of affairs for one hundred and fifty years, from the advent of Peter the Great up to the death of the Emperor Nicholas, to which the prevailing habits still bear witness. At first the sovereign and a few specially selected individuals abjured oriental ways, and turned themselves into Europeans by adopting their ideas, their politics, language and clothes. By degrees, during the end of the last century, the upper classes impulsively followed this example. In the first half of the present century, by the force of circumstances, those European influences penetrated still further. They permeated the administrative spheres, the schools, even to the country squire, the provincial nobility. A few, carried away by the uplifting movement, detached themselves from the masses, but the bed-rock of the nation

remained rebellious, immovable, with minds firmly set towards the East like the naves of their churches, and the praying Tartar, their former masters.

Forty years have passed, yet only the summits have caught the Western light; the vast valleys still lie plunged in the shadows of the past—with difficulty will they arise therefrom.

During all this time the unique spectacle was provided of a small ruling class—due to their newly adopted customs, ideas, and often language—having become complete strangers to the people they governed. This class received its intellectual food, both ethical and political, from so to speak imported sources, as from Germany, from England, or France, turn and turn about, but always from abroad. The supervision of orthodox glebes were frequently entrusted to aliens, " heathens " as the Russian peasant called them. In this mixed nationality the foreigners seemed to keep their eyes only on returns of the tax-gatherers and on the recruiting officers, and their sole object was to furnish the necessary instruments for ensuring the success of their diplomatic schemes on the European chessboard. There were exceptions, of course—a few attempts were made at national politics, at a " home policy "—but to affect ignorance of the native land, to banish all that was intellectually of the best in the nation, was the " correct thing." There are grandparents living to-day in Russia who excel in our tongue but are quite incapable of talking, certainly of writing, the language of their grandchildren. Catherine the Great was succeeded by generations of amiable men and women who, in turn, lived the elegant Paris life of the times of Louis XV, of the Empire, and of the Restoration, unaffected by our occasional revolutionary spirit which laid bare our aspirations fashioned by our writings—those great treatises on administration and on political economy. But not one of these administrators asked himself as to what lay in the

mind of the peasant in Yaroslaff or in Samara, or as to how he existed and suffered. These economists were ignorant of how wheat springs up in Russia—according to Pushkin, in a manner quite different to that in England.

In the shadow of this exotic plant the people, left to themselves, merely vegetated, and developed only in the dim light of their oriental instincts.

One can well imagine the terrible disorder brought about by such a cleavage. With our more gradual national development a middle class has been created which forms the natural medium for the leading ideas current between the summit and the base of the social pyramid. Such a class had no existence in Russia. It is still absent. There was nothing to bridge over this abyss, this *perelom*, as it is called over there, the full extent and width of which was not grasped until the "enlightened" Russians turned their faces once more towards their own Russia.

The first symptoms of this new evolution of thought were manifested in the latter part of the reign of Alexander I. A national fusion was then brought about, as is ever the case, on the battlefield, where all fought side by side against the invader. But though the first isolated attempts towards social cohesion were unsuccessful, an increasing number were daily drawn towards the civilized nucleus. It increased in size, but yet there was no unification. It is this failure which enabled the period in which Russia led a two-fold life to be prolonged to the time of the Emperor Nicholas' death.

Then, the need for a greater national fusion was experienced by every one, and in due course the true Russian spirit burst into life. It first manifested itself in the emancipation of the serfs. No less than a social revolution, it shook the foundations of the national conscience and gave it an entirely new lead. During the last quarter of the last century all the best minds have united to give solidarity to the nation. But what obstacles were

in the way! How was it possible to abolish the past; how to make the needed restitutions?

It was as if one of those worlds high up in the heavens were suddenly to come under the opposing influence of attracting forces. It breaks in two; a fragment flies to the distant star that calls it, while the main body gravitates towards less distant spheres. In spite of everything these two parts of a world tend to reunite. How will they succeed in traversing the wide expanse that separates them, and that in opposition to newly acquired forces? So with Russia, made up as she is of many utterly dissimilar elements, by turns attracted by opposite poles, repeatedly thrown against Europe, Asia, Turkey in Europe, and finally against her divided self.

This is what I call the "historic sufferings"—the disasters and profound discouragement which this people have received at the hands of a Deity that has never clearly indicated the path they should pursue.

To this ill-starred record must also be added that of the drawbacks of the soil and of the climate wherein the Russian drama is unrolled. Rigorous, interminable winters afflict the people, interrupt their labours, and sadden their thoughts. In the north a poor vegetation sets man a noble example for exerting vigorous energy in the hard struggle against nature. Is it not true that in time man's spirit is modelled by the characteristics of the land in which he lives?

If this is a fact, as I believe it is, then the strongly accentuated countries, clearly defined horizons, and other marked features are aids towards developing a strong individuality, with a clearness of conception and powers of perseverance. There is nothing of this kind in the Russian soil; not, at least, in the central regions where the dominant race was formed. There it is a water-logged remnant from chaotic times, overlooked by the Great Creator in his primary creative operations when dividing the waters.

Not a stone, not a striking feature, not a muscle in this flabby body; only that continuous monotony of which Tacitus writes *aut silvis horrida, aut paludibus fœda ;* that everlasting plain, stretching over thousands of miles, always the same, without a break in the horizon, without a feature—only and always the delusive image of snow, bog or sand ! Nowhere the mountain that challenges man to subdue it; on all sides the undefined which exhausts, yet attracts—but to no purpose. Tolstoy has well described it as " The Call of Desert." A country of vacuous minds, like those of the seafarer; self-centred, long-suffering and resigned, subject to sudden passions of desire ! A soil better suited to dwellers in tents than in houses, where the ideas are as nomadic as are the inhabitants themselves. Just as the cold blasts from the White Sea find no obstacles in their way to the Black Sea, so do invasions, calamities and the sorrows of slavery pass rapidly and irresistibly over these vast empty spaces. The direction taken is left to chance.

It is indeed a favourable soil for nourishing those confused aspirations towards annihilation, so deeply rooted in the Russian's heart, inherited by him from the beginning. It is certainly not the kind from which to expect the growth of a healthy, intellectual spirit needed for the advance in arts and literature. Nevertheless from even under these rude skies, and despite all misfortune, we shall yet behold the stubborn seed coming up—a seed so necessary to man that he seems to have brought from no one knows where, an everlasting springtime for its storage in every clime.

II

The Middle Ages—and in Russia this term, as already stated, may be taken to apply to the period ending with the advent of Peter the Great—has left its mark in two unmistakable forms. In a monumental literature of an

ecclesiastic nature—sermons, chronicles, treatises on ethics and on self-improvement; and again, in a mass of popular literature composed of epics, heroics and legends.

As regards the former there is nothing to be said that does not apply to a similar literature of the West. It is all in the same vein, but belated and poorer. As everywhere in Christendom, the Church remained a long time the sole instructress; what was not in her bosom was barbaric; monk and "man of letters" were synonymous terms. At first a writer was but a machine, a Chinese scribe. With the reeds from Greece, he laboriously copies the Testaments, Old and New. He was recognized as the depository of the mysteries of life. Surely such a great miracle could only be possible by special grace from on High!

Many generations of monks passed away before the idea came to these humble copyists that their talents could be used for recording their personal impressions. These began with homilies in imitation of the Byzantine Fathers; then followed lives of Saints; then the "Golden Legend" which found rest—and riches—in the Lavra at Kieff, that grand Slav centre of ecclesiasticism and of good works. This Legend is the novel of that period—a first effort of imagination towards realizing the ideal which fascinates every soul. Then came the historical narratives with their records of wars and afflictions which had to be endured. Nestor, the father of Russia's history, no doubt lent his name to numerous annalists. He observes and narrates as copiously as our Gregory of Tours. The Tartar invasion stifles these feeble germs of a new culture, and it is difficult to trace them between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The translation of the Bible in the Slav language was only completed in 1498. In 1518, Maximus the Greek arrived at Moscow. He was a monk of Mount Athos, who lived in Florence at the time of Savonarola, and a friend of "Alde Manuce." He brought with him the first printed books. He reformed the schools, and gathered round him

a band of men anxious to learn. Lay deacons—that embryon of state officialdom (chinovnik)—for the first time assisted the clergy with their translations of the Greek and Latin texts. Pope Sylvestre published the *Domostroy*, a treatise on current ethics and domestic thrift—a practical encyclopædia of Russia in the sixteenth century.

In the second half of this same century Ivan the Terrible endowed his country with a printing press. He erected at Moscow a Printers' Hall—a venerable building, portions of which are still in existence. The Tsar had endeavoured to obtain men skilled in this new art from Germany. But they were refused him. Sovereigns watched over these masters of the secret art with jealous solicitude, even as they did the successful alchemist or the clever forger of sword blades. A monk of Moscow, Ivan Fedoroff by name, the first to cast a type in the Slavonic characters, then set to work. By 1564 he had printed The Acts of the Apostles, the most ancient permanent record of national typography. Accused of heresy, the first Russian printer had to fly for his life. His miserable end seemed to be a prophetic symbol of what awaited spontaneous intellectual development in his country. Fedoroff wandered about among the magnates in Lithuania, and printed a few books in their castles; but his erstwhile patrons dragged him from his press to make him till the soil. "It is not given to me to sow the seed of wheat," he wrote, "but to sow the spiritual seed broadcast over the earth, to supply the world with food for the soul." He found refuge in Lemberg, and there died in miserable circumstances, having pawned his types to a Jew. His tomb is in the cemetery of Saint Onesipherus, and can be identified by the inscription there engraved by a faithful disciple, which runs, "The printer of Moscow, who printed books that were previously unknown." . . .

In the seventeenth century we come across some essays of a secular character. The hour is not auspicious, for it

is the time of "the Tribulation," [1] the day of "the usurpers," and the Polish revolution. Under the reign, however, of Alexis Michaelovich, Western civilization became established, and with it commenced the real dawn of intellectual life in Russia. The Tsar founds a Slavo-Greco-Latin Academy; he brings over troupes of comedians and ballet dancers to represent the mysteries of Simon Polotsky. But theology remains supreme in the Printers' Hall. Polemics, for or against schism—the *raskol*—engage all the energies of the Patriarch Nikon and his canons. Up to Peter the Great the authors of note are all theologians, such as Feofanos Procopovich and Stefanos Yavorsky. Their books bear the titles of *The Spiritual Life, The Rock of Faith, The Signs of the Advent of Anti-Christ,* and the like. Russia thus faithfully follows the evolutions of the Western spirit, but several centuries behindhand. Its development in the seventeenth century is analogous to that in France in the fifteenth. Froissard or a Commines in Moscow are still absent.

Far otherwise is it with the literature of the People. In no other country is folklore so varied and so sparkling as among the Slavs. The conditions of nature around them, their own history, were too commonplace—and the real facts of life too sad. Their imagination took refuge in that other world, superadded by the Creator as a divine jest whereby man could make for himself a free and charming life on the fantastic model of "what might have been." The critic Belinsky spoke the truth and struck the very keynote of his race that day when he declared that his country "was but a delusion." Any one can understand the poet Tucheff in his mystic lines—

> "As the orb of earth
> Is enshrouded by the ocean,
> So the life on earth
> Is surrounded by its dreams."

[1] (Before the advent of the Romanoffs.—Tr.)

The cycle of the *Byilins* is written in the form of visions or "dreams," embracing the entire national life. They are myths of fallen gods and fabulous men, of marvellous events, ever pursuing the human race; handed down through the past ages, under ever-changing garb; ancestral epic poems, songs heroic or tender, pitiful plaints of misery and rhapsodies in which recur the popular names, beloved or detested. It is, in fact, history set to music. For eight centuries, perhaps more, they are sung by the fishermen on the banks of the great rivers and by the cossacks in the Ukraina. These are the deep waters wherein are found the pearls! Later, when Russia matures true poets, they have but to dip into these sources to fill their own treasure troves. They will never create anything as good. Ah! what a poor occupation is that of the scribbler—the scholar laboriously chiselling at his artificial jewel! There is far more grandeur to be found in the imagination of that unknown author—the people—and in his humble heart far more poetry because of its greater faith, greater simplicity, greater sorrows.

I have been told of a piece of folly practised by Alexis Tolstoy, one of the later poets belonging to the glorious pleïadic constellation of Fiction. One day he promised to write some verses for the woman he loved. Of himself he could find nothing sad enough, nothing beautiful enough. He suddenly remembered meeting in the Orenburg Steppes, during one of his journeys beyond the Ural Mountains, a certain Kirghiz—one of those camel men who from out of a solitary reed bring forth the sad melodies of ancient Asia. Tolstoy demanded that this man, from the other end of Russia, might be sent to him. He then bade him play before the woman who had demanded a poem. He well knew that nothing in his own art could equal that chant composed by a multitude of sad souls, the outcome of many centuries.

What poem appropriate for song can be found worthy

to compare with that expression of the human soul in *The Book of the Dove* of the fifteenth century !

" The sun is the fire of the face of God; the stars fall from his mantle. . . . The night is dark because of the thoughts concerning the Lord . . . . The glorious dawn starts from his eyes." . . .

Will the human fiction writers, whom we are about to study, be able to find strains of greater tenderness or of greater bitterness than those in the rendering of that ancient tale, *The Ascension?* Jesus is about to be lifted up, and takes leave of His distressed followers.

" Father, who will feed us? Who will protect us in our misery? " Christ consoles them, " Cry not, my poor brethren. I will give you a mountain of gold, a river of honey. I will leave you vineyards, gardens with fruit, and manna from heaven." . . . But John the Apostle, interrupting, says: " Give them not mountains of gold; princes and landlords will seize and divide them. Thy brethren will not be allowed to come nigh. If thou wouldst have these poor wretches fed, clothed and sheltered, leave them Thy Holy Name, that they may glorify it in the world."

From among the poetry of the people in the Middle Ages one special work stands out conspicuously. It is the earliest, and is the prototype of all the others, entitled *The Sayings of the Band of Igor.* This epic symbolizes and celebrates the national struggle against the Polovtsi, the pagan hordes from the south-east, as do the songs of Roland the struggles of the French against the Moors. The anonymous songster of Igor dates but little further back than our Théroulde, and can share with him one portion of the Homeric inheritance. From out of the characteristics usually given to all epics, he has drawn a tragic poem wherein all nature is associated with the deeds of Russian heroes. This underlying sentiment of naturalism makes his work original. Do not seek in it the Christian charity

of the Western epics, devotion to the Virgin and to the saints, the heavens intimately mixed up with our daily actions. The soul of the primitive Slav is only Christian in name. He applies the epithet "Pagan" to the Polovtsi, but he is himself a pagan, baptized only the eve before. The powers he has faith in are the elementary forces, the dim mysterious life of the universe. His invocations are addressed to the rivers, the seas, to darkness, to the winds, to the sun "three times more blessed." The constant apposition of beneficial light to evil darkness recall the hymns of Egypt with their fundamental dogma—the struggle between day and night.

Never, by means more simple and more artless, has a more poignant impression of fantastic horrors been produced, and owing to incessant accretions of legends and folklore it even extends down to our own times. Everything that happens, whether on Russian soil or in the Russian heavens, is brought into it. I need not enlarge on its method of development, for that chapter of the history of literature has nowhere been better treated than in France, and by one of our authors.[1] I limit myself to pointing out as to what extent this lyric poesy, by its manner of growth, by its cosmopolitan and domestic character, is representative of the race. It plunges its roots into the antiquities of Asia, into the myths of the Hindus and Persians. Later, one can recognize the mark of a foreign graft on several of the branches it throws out.

The national heroes, Ilia de Murom, Vladimir, Ivan the Terrible, Mazeppa, elbow those of the Byzant, of the Round Table, of the Arabian Nights, Alexander of Macedonia, Solomon, the Tsar Kitovras, the sage Akir, the handsome Diogenes of the romance of Greek chivalry. In these contributions, alternately from the West and East, one sees again the perpetual oscillation of the Russian spirit as

[1] A. Rambaud, *Epic Russia*.

between two attracting poles. It reproduces and imitates more than it creates, but the foreign imagery which it reflects in the process acquires a larger proportion—a tone of melancholy, a note of lamentation and of brotherly love.

III

It will be different in the period we are now about to contemplate. And yet Belinsky in his studies on the eighteenth century writes: "Our literature starts from 1739, with the appearance of Lomonosoff's first ode. That is the 'Enfin Malherbe vint' . . ." of Despréaux. This judgment is well founded if by literature—using the word in a restricted sense—we understand the professional practice of an art cultivated for its own sake and according to certain rules. In every part of the edifice reconstructed by the Carpenter of Saardam, the scribe becomes a servant of the State, a "mandarin," who has his appointed duties and his official rank like any one else, whether soldier, administrator or magistrate. Like these, also, he must relearn everything in the Western schools. Always backward, Russia accomplished in the eighteenth century what we had done in the sixteenth. Only slowly could she construct a language suited to lay literature. Up to that time the old ecclesiastical Slavonic was the sole language available for all books.

Following the introduction of the foreign innovation it became less stiff, secularized, and welded into the vulgar tongue, and was eventually raised to the dignity of being "authorized." Foreign terms were smelted in. They accumulated from all sides.

As with the language, so the thoughts of men at first proceeded from the Church. She took hold of science and things mundane, ever definitely separated from matters of faith. She turned for her models to the ancient classics

and to nations more advanced. This is clearly noticeable. It was the work of Rabelais, of Amyot of Ronsard, but performed with infinitely less energy and success. What with us was a national labour, the result of an intellectual revolt already matured in many minds, was in Russia the outcome of one solitary will, the artificial work of a man who awakened sleeping men before the appointed hour. Literature cannot be created like an army or a code by a *ukase* from above. Imagine the Renaissance decreed by "Philip the Handsome!" That is exactly what was attempted in Russia, and that is why the results are so poor.

Another point of resemblance common to all epochs of renovation was the necessary fusion of the learned and lettered with the workmen in the task of reconstruction. The field was still restricted. The pioneers who first set to work had to be "all-knowing"; they had to be physician, geometrician, grammarian, poet—all in one.

Peter raised an Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, from which all matters intellectual had to emanate. In accordance with the wish of the founder, the academicians were to be the serjeant-instructors of his people for all mental exercises. They were first of all sent abroad, there to acquire the needed instruction. This period lasts nearly a century, during which time the Council of Education absorbs and sanctifies all the talents to services of public utility.

The most memorable initiator of this system was Lomonosoff, son of a White Sea fisherman, a child of the people in poor circumstances. By force of will this little "thirster after knowledge" used his natural gifts and then made good his position. He attracted attention at school. The State pounced on him and added him to one of those groups of students who are despatched to Germany, where as usual they just escape living on the charity of the local Universities. Returning to St. Petersburg, he found his

German masters installed in the Academy and receiving salaries. He fought them, took their place, and finally made the Russian element triumphant.

In his odes he was the first to subject verse to a rational metre. Eventually he bequeaths to his country the severe epic poem, *The Petriade.* What remains of all this? Nothing but a name justly revered. During these periods of preparation men, even the best endowed, are, like architects, condemned to the ungrateful task of digging at the foundations; their genius remains buried in the ground. To do them justice be it remembered, however, that the entire structure when completed by the more fortunate rests entirely on the genius there sacrificed.

It would seem as if the illustrious reign of Catherine II should have been added to by a literary renown. This remarkable woman stimulated the finest tastes among the chosen few of which she was the leading spirit; she herself scribbled off many comedies for her theatre at the Hermitage, as also some tracts on education for her grandchildren; whilst her friend the Princess Dashkoff presided over the lectures at the Academy. The Empress desired to show her illustrious courtiers from abroad—the French philosophers—that Russia held rivals worthy of her steel. But when boasting of this to Voltaire she could only impose on him the ghastly imitations of his own works. The foundations were too poor.

Cheraskoff put the *Rossiada* into rhyme. It is an epic on the lines of the ancient classics. Sumarokoff supplied the Court with tragedies. His contemporaries styled him the Racine of Russia. They would have been more exact had they said le Campistron. Von Vizine deserves to be remembered longer. His two comedies, *The Brigadiers* and *The Miner* can still be read without being bored. His plot is feeble, the style coarse and too belaboured to our taste, but there is a savour in this green fruit, a curious satire on the customs of his times, and rough and hearty

raciness, and in the language of to-day a special kind of "form." [1]

The name of Derjavin dominates this period, eclipsing all others. The Russians hold *The Chant of Catherine* in very high esteem. To them it is the official Pindar who fashioned their language to make it suitable for lyric poesy. I believe that this same courteous appellation is also invariably applied to the productions of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and Lefranc de Pompignan. Derjavin was no worse and no better than these French patterns. He, like them, could rise to the necessary pitch of enthusiasm obtainable in one's own study, after having comfortably settled down with the fixed intention of producing an ode. The advantage of that method is that it often leads to a paraphrasing of the psalms. A clever penman can always give it the illusion of grandeur when carried away by that supreme diction. Derjavin had the good fortune of living to a great age, and to have been well received at Court under several reigns.

Notable events, victories, anniversaries, in fact all subjects needed for dithyrambs flattering to the national pride came to him by birthright. It is the glory of old Russia and the grand memory of Catherine one respects in his work rather than the bombastic eloquence of his verses.

Pushkin was not wrong when, seeing his generation still bowing down before this idol, he wrote to his friend Delwig, saying, "This extraordinary man had no knowledge of the grammar or the soul of our language, and that is where he is so inferior to Lomonosoff. . . . When, in

[1] There has recently been translated a small volume of letters by Von Vizine de Montpellier, written whilst in this country on account of his wife's state of health. The observation of this stranger on our provincial customs in the last century are full of racy details. He also attended the sessions in the Languedoc. These letters are as interesting for us as those written from Paris by Karamsin.

due course, Derjavin will be translated, Europe will be astounded, and out of national pride we shall not dare to say all that we think of him. . . . Eight odes of his and a few fragments should be treasured—all the rest burnt."

In this period may be included the fabulist, Kriloff, though he actually lived a long time ago in our century. He imitated La Fontaine in that literary style in which it was the most difficult for him to be original. The fable is an old coin, subject to loss by exchange, re-minted in every country, but never recast. Kriloff possessed the talent of being able to give it a truly Russian form, a rough-and-ready humour differing greatly from the gentle good nature of his model.

Shall I mention other names from among those renowned a hundred years ago? That would be devoting much time to mere college exercises—to an artificial literature which drags itself through commonplace and faded ideas at the moment when the world is occupying itself with modern ones. Owing to their intimate connection with French writers of the eighteenth century, the Russian disciples have mostly kept to sonnets, tragedies, cast-off mythology, and the withered graces. They take the shell, but leave the kernel. It would appear that these friends of Voltaire, of Montesquieu, and of Diderot had only read Chompré, Crébillon or Chaulieu.

Catherine reserved her philosophy for her correspondence with foreigners. In Russia, with her own poets, she was on less dangerous ground. When reading the prose and rhymes which were declaimed before her at the Hermitage, one might fancy oneself listening to wits in the habit of coming together for a social entertainment whereby to distract their minds from their real affairs. It is of little interest.

One has to come to Karamsin to find a new departure in the way of imitation. An enthusiastic admirer of Jean Jacques, this gentleman brings back with him from his

journeys in France the spicy, sensitive literature then in vogue, known as "Sentimental." Poet, critic, political economist, romancer, historian, he took control of the Russian literature during the end of the eighteenth century and the commencement of the nineteenth, that is, during the last years of Catherine's and the commencement of Alexander's reign. He is the link between the classics and the novelists, simultaneously, the Rousseau and the Chateaubriand of his country. His name will be chiefly remembered in connection with the complete *History of Russia*, the compiling of which took up the latter half of his career. Owing to its size and its ornate verbosity, it is now out of date. The historian, as a matter of fact, arbitrarily reduces the whole national life to what suits the rise and development of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. His patriotism leads him astray. In flattering pictures he ennobles the most cruel despotism that had ever weighed down a Christian people. The documents discovered since Karamsin wrote his story refute the correctness of many of his assertions. But this "History" has the incontestable merit of being the first and the only reliable one up to twenty years ago, till M. Solovieff published his own laborious compilation. Still, it is the scholar's business at times to prefer a conscientious collection of undigested extracts, piled up regardless of order and of style. Those who look for an art in an history as well as information will maintain that up till now Karamsin has not found a rival.

His reputation did not arise in the first instance from this work. That was due to a few short romances of a sentimental nature ; one in particular, entitled *Poor Lizzie*. It is the case of Atala influencing the Genius of Christianity. This comparison is all the more apt because the two pamphlets for similar reasons had simultaneously produced drastic effects in St. Petersburg and Paris.

It would be curious to know what made our grandmothers weep so copiously when reading this piece of realistic fiction. The story is contained in a few words. " The gentle and sensitive Lizzie, a village girl beautiful of body and soul," makes a favourable impression on the heart of a rich gentleman named Erastus. " His heart was created naturally good, but it was weak and inconsistent." In the middle of this rustic idyll " Erastus in thought takes himself back to the days when human beings, without any cares, wandered about the prairies, bathed in limpid streams, embraced each other as do turtledoves, and reposed in happy idleness among the roses and myrtles." Erastus had forgotten the prejudices of his caste, and makes Lizzie a promise of marriage. But he forestalls the day in one of those moments " when the shadows of the evening nourish the desires and when no ray of light discloses errors." Betrayed, the " Poor Lizzie " renounces life by drowning herself in a tank . . . " under the ancient shadows, witnesses of her recent ecstasies." The developments of the theme are easily imagined. What is not easy to understand, however, is the amount of emotion and admiration which this tale evoked. Like Atala, " Poor Lizzie " inspired all artists, from the canvas painter to the china manufacturer. Sheets of water adorning sedate people's parks were named after her. What a number of small brackish pools have I not seen in the depths of the country in Russia thus christened by some dear old grandmother ! We may smile, but not too much; to-morrow we might come across tears shed on similar books, for fashion in literature moves in very small cycles.

I take again a few lines quite haphazard from an essay of Karamsin on the sciences. He writes : " The garlands of the graces embellish all conditions; the instructed labourer sits down after his toil on the tender grass with his helpmate, without envying the felicity of the most luxurious satrap."

Now let us compare this with a passage in a letter from the historian to his brother. "It is no longer possible to purchase a good cook; only drunkards and thieves of the worst type are now on sale."

Mark the wolf in the sheepfold!

Those two citations showing the *mujiks* disguised as Florian villagers, and their native barbarisms varnished over by borrowed elegance, clearly indicate the condition of the Russia of that day. Nevertheless, it was by the successive labours of all these second-rate writers that the Russian language was formulated. That is their real service, their best contribution towards the nation's intellectual progress, Karamsin on behalf of prose, and Derjavin on behalf of verse. In less than a century a literary language had been created, and it merely awaited the finishing touches to be imparted by Pushkin to make it one of the most powerful instruments ever held at the disposal of any literature.

Is it possible to aver that there was nothing during this period to disclose the natural bent of the Russian genius, nothing to indicate its future development? I myself find two symptoms that merit attention. One a sudden national reaction; the other a violent access of mysticism.

That same Karamsin played a political rôle totally different to his part as a man of letters. Owing to a contradiction frequently found among his compatriots, the scholar who copies Rousseau is in politics an irreconcilable Old Russian. With arguments drawn from Montesquieu he assails the fanciful liberalism of Alexander. Opposed to the emancipation of the serfs, already agitating the councils of the Emperor, he makes himself the champion of a system which could be stigmatised as pure Muscovitism, and which forty years later styled itself Slavophilism. Then, as to-day, the voice of Conservatism, demanding a return to the past, left Moscow where till then

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the historian of the Empire resided. Karamsin struggles against Speransky, now the reformer and the constitutionalist Minister. The moment he is fatally embroiled, in 1811, his antagonist addresses a famous memorial on *Ancient and Modern Russia* to the Sovereign. This captivates the mercurial Alexander, and is the finishing stroke for Speransky. Its author declares that the needs of Russia are being rushed " where there are perhaps not a hundred people who know how to spell. We must return," he says, " to our national traditions and sever ourselves from the ideas imported from the West. No Russian will understand constitutional fabrics, those ' limitations placed on sovereign power.' The autocrat bases wisdom on himself and on the love of his people "— so ends the epistle. M. Aksakoff himself in our time would not speak otherwise. This *Ancient and Modern Russia* contained in embryo all the demands for the future. Karamsin is the direct ancestor of the Slavophilism of those who consider null and void the reforms initiated by Peter the Great, whose ideal was the reconstitution of a self-conscious Russia outside the European movement. As this new political programme in time became a reality, it seemed important to note the first signs of its appearance.

I would say the same on behalf of the mysticism—that fundamental element of the Russian spirit—which breaks out under cover of Freemasonry. During the reign of Catherine the doctrines of the theosophists, brought over from Sweden and Germany, permeated Russia. Greedily welcomed by the small circle of writers, and even by the world under Novikoff's guidance, these shadowy ideas take solid form in their affiliation with Freemasonry. The lodges multiply quickly both in St. Petersburg and at Moscow. Novikoff founds the " Friendly Society," a coterie which included most of the writers and statesmen destined to become conspicuous during the reign of Alexander. Karamsin was one of them. This young man translates

and distributes in the schools the works of pious philosophers at this moment so freely circulating in Europe.

When the French Revolution burst into flame Catherine became frightened at the progress of "enlightenment." She closed the lodges, and seized all suspicious books. The movement was checked in 1792 by the trial and condemnation of Novikoff, to return with greater force in the reign of Alexander, who countenanced it.

Everybody knows how much the "friend" of Madame de Krudener felt attracted by all that appertained to the mystic, but fewer know how mysticism had equally become an enjoyable pastime among all the educated all over Russia. Biblical societies, Martinism, the Red Cross, Swedenborgians, were all in its favour. The highest intellects give way to the contagion. Speransky, the Liberal Minister, the author of *The Code*—a man who possessed greater genius than any Russian since Peter the Great—consoles himself in exile by reading San Martin and Swedenborg. He wrote to Zeier admonishing him, when meditating on the occult, to fix his attention on one point only, preferably the navel.[1] The frame of mind of the higher classes is faithfully depicted in the historical novel of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in the character of Peter Bezuchoff. Look, for instance, at the chapter which gives an account of the initiation of Peter into Freemasonry.

Doubtless this mental attitude was not peculiar to the country we are dealing with. The whole of Europe, dating from the end of the eighteenth century, was overshadowed by it as with a "mist before the storm." But it found an eclectic soil in Russia in a society already detached from orthodoxy, obsessed by the need for free-thought, profoundly agitated by the great efforts of 1812, uncertain how to deal with the secret forces now let loose amongst them. To a Novikoff, a Speransky, occultism is the vague protestation of the soul against the negative

[1] See letter written in 1817, published in *L'Archive Russe*, 1870.

philosophy of the encyclopædist—the man who knows everything—as also a protest against the invasion of pure rationalism. We find among our contemporaries in Tolstoy, and in Dostoyevsky, a renewal of these same protestations against the austerity of the positive sciences. For this reason, as also for others, the reign of Alexander I promised to become the subject of an interesting study yet to be attempted, for it is the point of concentration for all the great currents that agitate Russia to-day after her underground wanderings during the time of suppression under Nicholas.

Harmless at first, the Masonic lodges soon turned into mere laboratories of religious alchemy, and insensibly became entangled with politics. After 1815 they formed the framework of a celebrated society built up on the lines of the German Tugenbund, known as "The Alliance for Good Works." It evolved the Liberal conspirators known as the Decembrists, finally crushed in 1825. The fear of our revolutionary ideas and the memory of the cruelties perpetrated in 1812 now caused a quick change in Russia's position. A momentary estrangement succeeded the former docile submission to French influences.

Germany, the ally with whom we had been fought against for the sake of a common deliverance, inherited our domination. This sudden change was of great consequence to Russian literature. During the whole of the eighteenth century we had trained the Russian spirit to an imitation of the classics. It now turns away from them as it does from us. The Germans are now going to instruct it in the field of romance.

CHAPTER II

ROMANCE—PUSHKIN AND POETRY

THE twenty-five years known as "The Truce of the Poets,"[1] which intervened between an era of great political disturbance and the period of universal social and industrial struggle was—both for Russia and all Europe—like the springtime of a new era. Man, having destroyed his old house, sat down for a moment to rest and sing before he built anew.

During those years of romanticism, so short and yet so pregnant, intellectual Russia seemed to live only for ideals, for love and harmony. But suddenness is the characteristic of all new births in that country. As suddenly as on the first melting of the snows the prairies are covered with flowers, Russia swarmed with poets, and everybody spoke in verse. It seemed to come naturally to all cultivated men.

Among this crowd of poets many are lovable, but only one excels. He absorbs all others in his own radiance, and gives his name to the epoch. It is the glorious Pushkin.

That this should have been so was an injustice. It was, however, a striking illustration of the aptness of the saying that in literature priority of title is nothing, its beauty everything. Jukovsky, twenty years older than Pushkin, preceded him and also for a long time survived him. That he was the real initiator of romanticism in Russia nobody will deny. He was the first to bring the

[1] 1815–1840.

new doctrine from Germany, and he remained faithful to it for half a century.

The amount of his work is considerable. He has produced a version of Homer in the Russian tongue which, thanks to its affinity to the Greek, permits every inflection, each effect of that language, to be faithfully rendered, as if cast in soft wax. He also made numerous imitations of Schiller, Goethe and Uhland; many original compositions—elegies or ballads—also poems, melancholy and sentimental. All, however, are tinted with "Prussian Blue," borrowed seemingly from the gentle Novalis. The themes treated by Jukovsky are mostly preludes to those taken up later by Pushkin, in the same key, and on the same instrument. He is a Perugino to a Raphael. At the time the pupil was entering college, the master was already writing ballads on Russian subjects, such as *Ludmila* (1808), and *Svetlana* (1811). Were any good lines taken out of these last-named works and slipped into the *Russlan* or *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, it would require an experienced eye indeed to detect the fraud. Nevertheless all Russians are unanimous in telling us that their modern poetry dates from Pushkin and remains identified with his name, for Jukovsky belonged to those timid spirits created to become satellites, mere reflecting orbs, even though the first to arise. But however vivid the clear light of the moon, however much it may resemble the dawn, we count the day from the moment she is replaced by the sun.

I

Pushkin, the favoured child of destiny, now declares himself with almost insolent pride. He triumphantly leads a whole constellation of intellectuals who grouped round him at the Lyceum and remained under his domination at Arzamas. Both these cradles of romanticism have

claims to a lasting memory in the general history of Russia. Their own history fills the works of commentators and biographers, to be presently considered.

To appreciate fully the importance of their rôle, it must be remembered that in that vast Russian country—where the great multitudes seem to have overwhelmed all institutions and individuality—the intellectual world was actually a very restricted one. A very small number could influence the mass. The feeble hand of one woman, a select "salon," an unpublished pamphlet, have been sufficient to guide that blind and obedient colossus.

At the commencement of the century, the education of the Muscovite aristocracy was in the hands of the Jesuits, financially supported by the Emperor Paul. One of the first results of the national reaction was the withdrawal of the grants made to these foreign instructors and to place them in Russian hands.

In 1811 Alexander I founded the Lyceum of Tsarskoe-Selo strictly on Napoleonic models. Admission was to be a favour accorded to birth and talent. The first establishment of the college (in 1817) belonged to men who had made their mark in the century, headed by the two *illuminati* Pushkin and Gortschakoff. But Tsarskoe-Selo was not a stronghold of learning, for the masters had been improvised without much selection. I note among them, as a Class Inspector, one Piletsky, an enlightened man, a "martinist," a disciple of Tatarinova, the then celebrated prophetess. Also the professor of literature, M. de Boudry, who, passing under that name, was the brother of Marat. He taught his pupils of how "the Friend of the People" had been done to death by Charlotte Corday, "a second Ravaillac." It was also discovered that one of the masters was an escaped convict, and that on his conscience lay the burden of four or five murders. The students associated freely with the officers of the Guard regiments stationed in the vicinity of the Imperial residence. They shared

the suppers and feasts of the "gay Hussars," thus early acquiring the lessons taught by Faublas, the classic of their dreams.

Such an education turned out no scholars. But suddenly among the larches in Catherine's park there arose a wind which fanned into flame the concentrated passions of poetry and patriotism in these misguided youths.

These children were men on the morrow of 1812. They had witnessed the proud bearing of defiance with which the invasion of their country had been met. Their minds were filled with the stories of disaster and deeds of heroism. The name of Napoleon frequently recurs in Pushkin's impassioned verses. If one knew the secrets of gestation, there can be no doubt, but that this—Russia's "Year of Terror"—was the hour of moral birth of more than one of the elect among the poets, thinkers and politicians of that country.

On leaving college, this select and ardent band, cemented by firm friendship, met again at Arzamas.

This name was given to a kind of club, or academy, which to Russian romance was what a little later "The Cenacle" [1] became to us—a centre of attack and defence against classics. The gathering at Arzamas also became famous under another name. Poetic debates degenerated rapidly into political discussions. The Hotspurs among the group and friends of Rileyeff began there to conceive the ideas and projects which culminated in the plot of December 1825.

From here too a strong educational influence spread to the Society of St. Petersburg, that light-hearted and select society, thirsting for pleasure in whatever form, even the most doubtful, made reckless by familiarity with the great events just gone through. It still retained the outward refinements of the old order of things, but mingled with the illusions and enthusiasms of modern times.

[1] A literary society.—(Tr.)

As soon as Pushkin appeared among them he was received with acclamation as a leader and recognized as chief by his rivals, Delvig, Baratinsky, Yasikoff, as also by his elders, Jukovsky and Batushkoff. In all literary epochs there arises a " privileged one " to monopolize the few favourable opportunities granted to his generation. At the gaming-table, when all are nervous and cautious, such a one is the smiling gamester, certain of himself. By his very audacity he conquers fickle Fortune and makes her prisoner at the very moment she is slipping through the fingers of others.

In 1817 he reaches St. Petersburg from college, already a celebrity—beloved of the gods. He is one of those who have the privilege of having been created for the occasion. The aged Derjavin, on handing over the " academic wreath," blesses him as his appointed heir. His verses are the rage—even before they are published. They come forth without effort, like flowers in spring. Pushkin throws them about disdainfully in the drawing-rooms. He has really no need for such extravagance to make himself popular; for he bears already an historic name, a name that has been heard with pride during the Middle Ages, in the wars with Poland, among the tragedies of the Kremlin. Better still, he has the personal gift for pleasing and fascinating.

To understand his genius fully, however, his twofold origin must not be lost sight of. He was the son of an old boyar who for an ancestor on the maternal side had an Abyssinian negro, Abraham Hannibal, a famous slave who had been stolen by a pirate from the Seraglio at Constantinople and cast off in Russia. He was adopted by Peter the Great, who, after having made him a general, married him to a lady at Court.[1] A freak of atavism reproduced in the features of the poet those of the negro general. Everybody on seeing his portrait for the first

[1] Jukovsky, also, was a natural child of a Turkish slave.

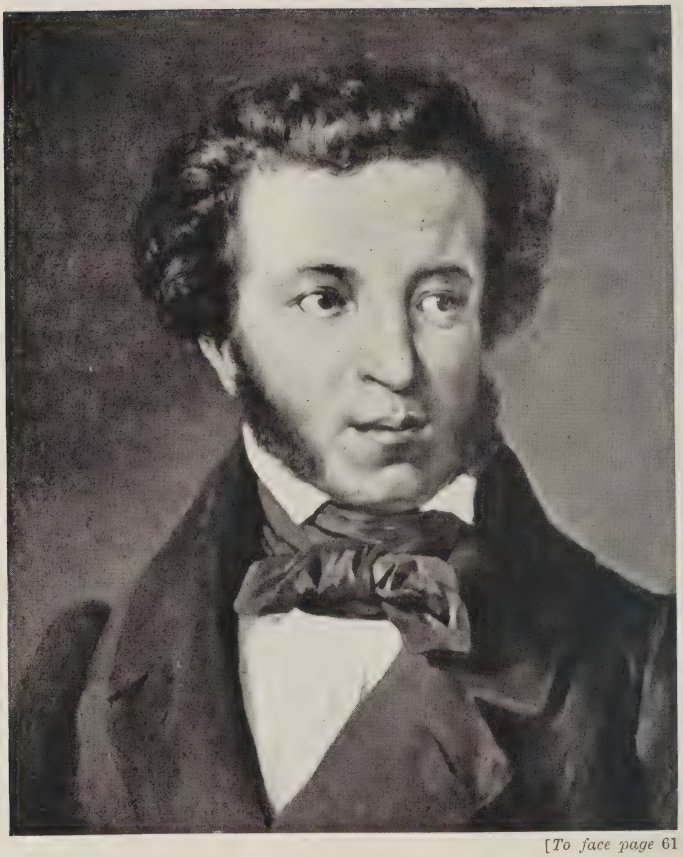
time is at once struck with its ugliness, coupled with its astounding intelligence and charm. The large lips, the white teeth, and the woolly hair are most remarkable. The drop of African blood falling on the snows of Russia may explain his many contradictions—passion and melancholy—welded together in this remarkable nature.

Pushkin's youth, like those of Lamartine and Byron, was like a romance—the dream of all adolescents, but realized only by the one who seemed to have embodied all the dawning glories of his age. It is to be found, retailed, mocked at, cried over in the *Onegin* and his *Elegies*. His days were spent in a lordly fashion, sometimes too extravagantly. No youth threw himself with greater zest into the world, gathering all his life into his heart to make it burn the faster. He spoke no lie when boasting that he had "enjoyed everything to the full." [1] In vain the iron portals of fame, so hard for others, opened wide to bid him enter. His one desire was love. At the outset, for him as for others, poetical renown is but a means for conquest or for revenge in the service of passion.

"Were I desirous of fame it would be that my name should strike upon every ear;—that I only may surround thee!—that, at every rumour everything and all should speak of me—to thee—that when alone thou hearest the loyal voice—thou wilt remember my last appeals—in the garden in the hours of the night, at the moment of saying farewell." [2]

He succeeded in everything. Even his follies were helpful to him. A roysterer, and a libertine in thought as well as in deed, intimately bound up with the Decembrist confederates, it seemed as if it would be his fate to share that of these conspirators—all his friends. It was his good fortune, however, to have forestalled the Imperial anger. Some insolent verses and a cartoon containing

[1] *Onegin*, Canto VI. [2] *Desire for Glory*. 1825.



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PUSHKIN

skits on saints, as adapted from Alcibiades, brought on him well-merited disgrace. He was condemned to a short exile on the shores of the Black Sea, and he turned this into a season of glorious adventures in the Caucasus, in the Crimea, and in Bessarabia. In these pleasant places he heard the "call of the East," and it took hold of him. He works hard and expands. Without doubt this exile, which tore him away from "the Arzamas," saved him from being sent to Siberia.

He returned hardly the wiser, but with a talent fully matured at twenty-five years of age. During these short years his larger works were hurried on, and whilst great ideas surged through his brain he was consuming his best affections in risky love-affairs, and spending his great literary gains on the bare boards of any lodging-house where a Hussar might offer him a few moments' gamble. On a certain occasion at Moscow, while in a fit of jealousy, he was publicly seen to bite the shoulder of the Governor-General's wife—Countess Z——, to whom he was at the time devoted. Thus he continued to the end a squanderer and self-indulgent, ever demanding from this wretched tree of life more fruit than it is able to bear without breaking.

He collapsed before his time, involved in an unsavoury and mysterious tragedy. In 1830 he had married a woman as renowned for her beauty as he was as a poet. A woman of ordinary capacity, she failed to understand this man of genius and the "divine spark" that actuated him. The fierceness of his African passion inspired his wife with feelings of terror from the effect of which she never recovered. Later, when remarried to a good-natured old colonel, who made her very happy, she once declared that Pushkin "surrounded her with flames." Strange to say she was the innocent cause of his death. He was constantly persecuted by secret enemies, who one day, in connection with a low intrigue the exact truth

of which will never be known, forced him to take notice of some scandal which pointedly referred to his own hearth. The story of the duel is common knowledge. At thirty-seven years of age he fell to the bullet of an officer of the Russian Guards—who in course of time became a French Senator of the Second Empire.

Had his luck forsaken him? By no means. I see it still! Visible decay is sad for all, but particularly so for the poet. For him old age brings no compensating mercies. To Pushkin, Fate allotted the bullet which some of Lamartine's admirers dared to have wished for him. He disappeared young and in his prime—full of renown, credited with all the unfulfilled great works that are usually placed to the credit of men of that stamp. He escaped seeing the death-agony of his doctrine or the betrayal of his disciples in search of another master. He had resuscitated romanticism—and had made it pass through the various phases permissible to this art. As it was about to expire, it may be said to have been dragged with him into the grave, leaving the impression that it lived only but for and through him.

Are we to lament those lying dead, wrapped in their own colours, or those who survive?

Were his work to be judged by the glance we have just had of the personality of the man we might have expected a record of disorder, of confused and violent passionate screams. This would be a great mistake. In this erratic heart full of folly there also existed the spirit of highest literary diction and order, clear and matured, classic in the best sense of the term. It was strange that our own classical works should be the only ones esteemed by this novelist, for in his letters and in his critical essays he is severe and contemptuous of those very poets who accomplished in France a revolution analogous to that which he led in Russia. He ranges himself against them on behalf of Racine and Boileau. We notice that as soon as

his talent has fully developed he shows a preference for form over colour. In his more plastic poems one is surprised to note the continued reaction against lyrical sentiments, the obstinate efforts of the mere artist in opposition to his natural instincts. These are excitable, impressionable even to excess, under little control, just as if a sensitive film were exposed to many vibrations of light, making a well-defined picture an impossibility.

Let us look at him, for instance, at a moment when he gives free vent to his first impression—as, for example, in the following fragments, written when camping out in the Caucasus. One day whilst reading Dante he heard a drum beat—

"Hark! the reveillé! From my hands drops my old Dante. On my lips the verse begun . . . expires before I have been able to read. . . . Its song has bounded away. . . . Oh! familiar, thrilling sound. How often has thine echo . . . and below there where I . . . Ho! Below there—for me stay . . . in that distant far off day . . .!"[1]

Here we have the poet in his primitive state, so to speak, unrestrainedly responding to the vibrations around him. But promptly the austere master intervenes to regulate the rhythm, for he received what is always in the best interests of the student, a technical training—to work against the grain!

He owes this equilibrium of his faculties to his first French masters, chiefly to Voltaire.

When writing on historical subjects such as Poltava—Boris Godunoff, his acquired style mercilessly crushes out his inborn tastes—he knows how to be impersonal, how to efface himself behind the parts he creates.

This perfect balance of mind Pushkin owes to his own cheerful temperament. For he can be merry, this poet—the composer of some of the most piercing wails in an age

[1] *The Reveillé.* 1829.

full of lamentations! No one has better belied his true nature, no satiated hand has more successfully stirred the ashes overlying dead joys.

How often and in what many forms has he not returned to those verses in his *Onegin*. "The man who has thought and who has lived cannot, dare not, in his heart despise humanity. . . . The man who has been thrilled, will ever be tormented by the vain visions of days irreparably gone by. For him are no more songs of approval—in him remain only the viperous stings of memory." [1]

So he wrote, but his good-humour soon regained the upper hand—it was his saving grace. He possessed that illogical quality which precludes one from being an impotent fool. When aware of treachery, he voluntarily consented to become the dupe. He knew that the world beat hollow under foot, but he continued his steps.

The contradictions as well as the solidarity of his moral nature are well represented in his *Onegin*—a work he always carried about with him. It developed slowly, taking eight years of his youth for its production. It reminds one, at times, of *Mardoche* and of the *Childe Harold*.

Who is addressing us there? Is it a street urchin, a philosopher, a sceptic, or perhaps a fanatic? He is all these rolled into one. Pushkin's fascination lies indeed in his intense vitality; and life has an all-powerful magnetic influence on all men. They come to it as the poor come to the rich. The greater the riches, the more humble and the greater the number of those attracted.

The personality of the poet must be studied in his writings. What torrents of living waters! What a variety of outlook! What naturalness! Yes, that is certainly his ruling quality. He is always so genuinely natural! That is why his "poetic melancholy," "his waves of passion," never bore us. His cry of a wounded

[1] *Onegin*, Canto I.

heart is sincere—it is almost involuntary. Quickly, however, he is able to revert to his ordinary state of mind, to that mental intoxication in which he finds distraction. Our great writers of "lamentations" and their imitators show themselves only clothed in black, and are their true selves only behind closed doors; such perpetual mourning makes one tired, for it is false and unnatural.

Hence it is also why his figure stands out, and why it is so difficult to set him conspicuously in that conventional frame which is dear both to the critic and the reader. Those characters,—and they are many—who adopt an attitude—a pose—are easy to take hold of. Possibly the secret for rapidly becoming a celebrity is to keep still —then a photograph is easily taken. The man who assumes an attitude seems to us quite logical—we understand him, for the genius he exhibits is a human attribute of the kind that appeals to our comprehension. We are thankful that we are able to understand. We admit him to be our superior—innocents that we are! On the other hand, the natural man gives full play to the Creator's workmanship within. That is beyond us; we shall never fully understand it, and our stunted logic is annoyed at being foiled. To understand Pushkin's contradictory nature one has to recall his double origin—African and Russian—his education and his social surroundings. The critic is in duty bound to put forward these feeble excuses. I make the attempt but I know their value, for it is useless to pretend to be able to explain everything concerning a poet. Woman is dear to him. Better to love her for herself than to try to understand her, for the look that scrutinizes is no longer that of a lover. And Pushkin deserved to be loved.

I am unable to explain it. For the reasons previously indicated I shall not enter into the details of his labours. It would be necessary to cite and to translate this language of pearls, and would be taking a risk sufficient to make one

mad with despair! He himself admitted it. "I am of opinion," he wrote, "that nothing is more difficult than the translation of Russian verse into French; because of the conciseness of our language, one cannot in French be sufficiently brief." Mérimée once affirmed that only in Latin could such an amount of ideas be crowded into so few words and with the same brilliancy, the same turns, as in Russian. I remember having seen a firefly brought home between two leaves of a small copy of the *Onegin* by a young girl just returned from Naples. It was an infinitesimal particle of a glorious Italian night, but all the charm of its luminiferous light departed the moment it had been touched. Thus would perish Russian poetry were I to transpose it in these pages. Moreover, the principal object of this volume is the consideration of the way the particular genius of these Russians manifests itself in the works of their writers. In this respect I do not think Pushkin and his writings will aid us much. This is an heterodoxy which will make the poet's compatriots, so jealous of his rights, very indignant. But I hasten to explain myself.

Certainly it would be a crowning injustice to see in Pushkin but a servile imitator similar to those about whom we have just been writing. The words of Goethe about Byron equally apply to him with regard to the models which he chose for inspiration: "Lord Byron has taken my *Faust* and has made it his own. The work is completely recast." It is none the less true that Pushkin, as seen in the ways in which he characterized his talent, has always been directly influenced by the great currents of European literature. In childhood his mind was formed by the writings of the emigrants de Montfort, Rousselot, Xavier de Maistre; his father knew Molière by heart; his uncle died reading Béranger. When he entered college he hardly knew his mother tongue. He fed on Voltaire, devoured de Parny, and other sires of that species.

According to their methods he produces with equal grace—simultaneously—vulgar impertinences and love-sonnets to Chloris, all in French verse. His first attempts in Russian verse are but imitations of those rhymsters. *Russlan and Ludmila*, the poem of his youth, his first triumph with which he entered the battlefield of romance, is in imitation of Ariosto. An old charmer, the Merlin of the Slav legends, torments the two lovers. The hero, by the aid of his sword, delivers the beautiful heroine with great difficulty. Being quite in the fantastic style of the Troubadour, it is difficult to understand to-day the amount of enthusiasm excited by this puerile bit of artificial school-boy effusion.

In the *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1824) we see the Byronic influence; one which henceforth becomes predominant. From the first Pushkin frankly calls him the " master of his ideas." Little by little, however, his own individuality discloses itself. And in the successive cantos of the *Onegin*—a kind of *Childe Harold*—he slowly disengages himself from the English model and attains to an originality of his own, though it is quite certain that but for a Byron, his *Onegin*, the *Gypsies*, and the *Oriental Poems*, even that excellent *Poltava*, would never have seen daylight.

In the latter part of his life he develops a passion for the historical. He turns to Shakespeare, there to learn the process of the historic drama. He acknowledges this fact in the two letters serving as a preface to his *Boris Godunoff*. He does not attempt to deceive himself, for he admittedly produces a Shakespearean drama using a Muscovite theme.

In his *Tales of Belkin*, the *Captain's Daughter*, the *Queen of Spades*, and especially in his *Pugacheff's Rebellion*, we once more find a writer who has received the ineffaceable imprint of Voltaire. The outline of the plot, the choice of details, the clear and precise phrases—often terse—

all tend to show that he thought in French. Moreover its style has no resemblance to the Russian.

I am nevertheless quite aware that the Slavophils contend that Pushkin in his *Songs of the Western Slavs* was the " mystic evocator " of the Russian soul. Alas ! they should have said the " mystifier " ! The dear poet daringly translates the Servian songs of the "Guzla," as composed by Mérimée and annotated by the Abbot Fortia. Then lo and behold, his contemporaries shout aloud that now at last the true national poesy has been revived ! It is true the Slavophils do not admit being in the wrong. They still insist that the mere fact of impertinent and vulgar French jokes having been translated into Russian verse becomes a sacred monument to the God of its race. It is a mild form of hallucination, and it would be cruel to insist any further.

I believe the truth to be as follows—

Putting aside the later cantos of the *Onegin*, which contain the exquisite representation of Tatiana, and a few bits of rare sentiment such as the *Winter Tracks*, the *Roussalka*, the *Bear*, it must be admitted that Pushkin's work, taken as a whole, does not disclose a pagan spirit. It is a romance permeated by the same spirit which animated his brethren in Germany, England and France at the same time. He merely expresses the universal sentiment, but applies it to Russian themes. He views the national life from without, as all those artists do who have freed themselves from racial influences. Compare, for instance, his descriptions of the Caucasus with those of Tolstoy in the *Cossacks*. The poet of 1820 sees nature and the men of the East from the same point of view as do Byron and Lamartine. To him it is a coloured splendour inhabited by poetic beings who love, suffer and dream in the European manner of the day, as he knew it. To the observer of 1850, on the other hand, this corner of Asia is a re-discovered ancient bit of his own native country.

He here strives to understand his half-brothers, and he faithfully presents them living lives very different to our own, though in a slight measure resembling his own. If you wish for another example, take that beautiful poem, the *Brother Bandits*, and place them alongside the descriptions of the convicts as reproduced from life by Dostoyevsky. In that romance, the Russian bandits are the natural descendants of Lara, seen from afar by a great lord, who credits them with a large measure of poetic capabilities. There is, however, nothing on earth to distinguish them from Catalans or Sicilians! Whereas the convicts of Dostoyevsky are the peasants from the Volga or the Dnieper, and one feels that their limner would have murdered and expiated even as they, had his unlucky star so guided him.

Finally, and it is the point of the whole matter, in Pushkin's writings you will find no trace of the features common to all those who succeeded him—no shadowy mysticism, no philosophic anxieties. Feelings of religion are, I fear, to him but poetic methods. On all matters this Slav has the definite ideas of the Athenian. His melancholy is not due to the oppressions of the Russian, nor to terrorism or livid skies, nor to beholding the misery around him. It comes to him from the " woes of the age " and from all past ages; from the fact that life, itself good, commits the wrong of fleeting away too quickly; of love, coming too soon to an end! On the other hand, he possesses all the literary qualities which are absent in the writings of his own countrymen. He is as concise as they are diffuse, as clear as they are confused. His elegant style is polished, alert, and rings as pure a note as that of a Greek bronze. In a word, he has that special flavour, for which hereafter there will be no further demand in Russian literature.

Is it disparaging Pushkin to take him out of his nationality and place him among humanity in general?

I do not think so. Let it be said, if one will, that he

represents a small class in that great country; the cosmopolitan class to which he naturally belonged, and that though he had a dominant influence in it, his marvellous ability enabled him to extricate himself from it for the purpose of modelling himself on his foreign patrons.

This judgment, however, certainly contains only part of the truth and not the whole truth. Chance, which gave birth to this man in Russia, might have placed him in any other country, and his work would not thereby have been affected. It would have always remained what it is, a simple mirror which faithfully reflected all the human emotions, clothed, however, in the style and garments adopted in the '30's by the cosmopolitan society of Europe; for these same verses in which he extols the Russian character, Russian passions, Russian patriotism, by the mere change of a few words would in every detail be applicable to the Englishman, the Frenchman or the Italian. I once more apologize to the Slavophils, whom I know I grieve, but if it is a fine thing to be a son of Rurik, it is a finer thing still to be a son of Adam; and if, as they think, it is a great favour to be specially accounted a Muscovite, there are perhaps a greater number to be taught to think, to cry and to laugh, amongst the many living elsewhere.

In this Pushkin succeeded. He has well served his countrymen whom he so little resembled. More than any other writer has he aroused their intellectual life, and it is not too much to say that he deserves the title of Peter the Great of letters. The national conscience has made no mistake, and this fact has justified the poet's own proud words : " The monument I have raised to myself is not made by mortal hands—and no moss will be found in the highway which leads thereto."

II

Around and beneath Pushkin the forest of romance is thick with undergrowth. They press into his shade, these poets, just as the birch trees in low-lying places of Russia are seen to group themselves round a large oak. These fragile and shadowy phantoms, delicate and graceful, all exactly similar, sing the same song to the sound of the same wind wafting abroad the leaves of their short summer. In the long list of names of those who have had the good fortune to have been struck with a momentary flash of success two only are worthy of arresting our attention—they are Griboyedoff and Lermontoff. Both are beyond comparison. Want of time alone prevented their realizing the highest promises. Before they had begun a great work they were removed by a violent death, which was also the lot of most of these men.

The former has only left us a comedy—but the finest ever placed on the boards in Russia, and one of the best in the entire theatrical world. Griboyedoff is interesting because he escapes all classification, all ruling influences. A contemporary of Pushkin, he owes him nothing. He ignored the accomplished revolution. Immersed in studying the ancient Muscovite traditions, hostile to foreign literature (which he had anathematized by one of his friends), Griboyedoff is Russian to the marrow. It is the people of his country and their habits and customs which he brings before us. He knew so well how to appropriate the feelings of the masses that his verses have passed into proverbs. One finds them on every lip, among the most uneducated. And yet Molière is his master. His book known as the *Misfortune of Being too Clever* has more than one passage in common with the *Misanthrope*, to which, rather ambitiously, some of his Russian critics have compared it. Chatsky is a younger brother of Alceste, more

bitter, more rebellious, but conscious of his own impotency, like some of Turgeneff's heroes, Rudin for one.

How dark and full of gall was the outlook on life and society as it is seen in this comedy; but how mischievous, how telling!

This cruel gaiety we find again in the *Inspecting Officer;* it is the usual seasoning of all Russian comedies which usually take the form of a "protest." But the work of Griboyedoff is to my thinking far superior to that of Gogol, having a wider range and being more searching. The verses, moreover, are more refined. The first act is especially brilliant. It bursts on us and rattles like the fire of a machine gun. The verses, crowded with ideas, flow on in rapid succession in a steady stream. Each one makes a hit, and the spectator is continually being surprised with its cutting satire, wit and good sense. The third act concludes in an effective scene powerfully rendered—worthy of *Hamlet.*

Chatsky, the patriotic misanthrope, stands in the middle of a ballroom inveighing against the adoption of French antics by the people of Moscow, and pleads for the return to old ways. At first he is listened to with attention, but by degrees the music strikes up again, the dancing recommences. He continues his violent speech; stops and begins again. The young couples continue dancing without heed. The valse drowns the gloomy words!

Yet whilst most of the choicest pages of ancient romance have a mouldy smell of faded flowers, the *Misfortune of Being too Clever* has not aged by a day. Modern satire does not paint with any different colours when hitting at the eccentricities, the rancours, the passions which exist among the Russians of to-day. Would this justify a disparaging conclusion? Are the pictures representing the vices of humanity less subject to change than his efforts of the imagination which enhance the beauty of their lives?

The censor intervening, Griboyedoff's work was never published nor even put in print. But when the manuscript began to be circulated, his fame was established at once. It was instantly accepted, and acquired the admiration of those select circles who impose their will upon the public. For a while it even held the balance against Pushkin. The latter was, however, quickly reassured, but in a manner most distressing to his noble heart.

Whilst travelling to the Caucasus in 1829 he unexpectedly met a bullock cart escorted by two Georgian guards going down a steep approach to a ferry. "Where do you come from?" "From Teheran." "What have you got there?" "Griboyedoff." It was indeed his corpse being brought to Tiflis. The author of the *Misfortune of Being too Clever*, Russian Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of the Shah, had at the age of forty been murdered by a bandit in Persia.

Let us remain a while in the Caucasus and listen to Lermontoff, the poet who was so much attracted by its charms. In the first half of the century the Caucasus was to Russia what Algeria is to us, a land of dreams and of adventure, whither the noblest as also the most foolish wend their way to sow their wild oats. But whereas Africa returns us seasoned and well-trained officers, Tiflis sent back poets. One can easily understand the fascination of this Eden. It offered the Russian youth what he desired most—mountains, sun and freedom. There, at the summit of the oppressive slopes of snow, stands Elbruz —the "Pinnacle of Happiness"—with its scintillating glories piercing the azure sky. Beyond lay Asia, that fairyland, with its superb scenery, picturesque peoples, streams singing among the plane trees, daughters of the Khans dancing before Turkoman tents! Visions of unrestrained camp life in the open and in the forest, speaking of the memories of deeds of valour enacted under the

historic standards of such names as Paskevich, Yermoloff, Baratinsky.

All who thought themselves bored to death by the inanities of life in St. Petersburg fled thither. Sometimes they went as exiles, as in the case of Pushkin, followed later by Lermontoff. The latter when an officer in one of the regiments engaged in the conquest of the Caucasus, spent a part of his short life in these mountains. Hence their forming the background of all his poems. There he also died, killed in a duel at the age of twenty-six—as was Pushkin—at the very moment when public opinion pointed him out as his successor (1841).

With Lermontoff we enter the main current of the romantic literature. He has amply used the instruments fashioned by his predecessor, but he does not on that account forsake his beloved Byron, the master he and Pushkin had in common. The creator of the *Onegin*, however, had only borrowed the poetry from the writer of *Childe Harold*, whereas Lermontoff had seized its soul! He is entitled to have claimed for him what has been said of Byron: "Life's currents in this heart were too tempestuous—they overflowed with good and evil on the slightest occasion." But little of good, I am afraid!

In this gloomy youth, violent and exuberant sentiment changed into poison. He was filled with Pushkin's frantic passion without the restraining influences of that man's habitual good nature. His contemporaries agree that he was cross-grained and vindictive—a sullen companion. They said that the author of *The Demon* needed only look within for his Lucifer.

The productions of an author who dies at the age of twenty-six are necessarily very limited, but some bits sparkle as brightly as the glaciers about which he sings, and promise to endure as long. His most conspicuous work is *The Demon*, which reminds one of the *Eloa* of

Alfred de Vigny,[1] but it is to Milton that Lermontoff may be best compared, because of the magnificent powers of description and the force of feeling. There are few finer verses than those in which the Fallen Angel descended to earth, proclaims his love to the Caucasian girl: "My paradise and my hell are in thine eyes. . . . I love thee with a love unknown to those here, beloved . . . with a love of which these too are incapable. . . with all madness, with all my strength . . . with thoughts and dreams everlasting. . . . In my soul since the world began . . . thy image is engraven . . . ever wafted before me . . . in the deserts of primordial ether!"

An unknown poem of Lermontoff's, named *Sashka*, has been recently discovered. It is a sort of autobiography wherein a tormented soul whose nature is a mixture of grand imagination and acrid railings is completely exposed to view. The following fragments may give some sort of an idea—

"Everything will disappear. I am obliged to believe . . . that our earth with no light-giving power of its own is but the dying ember of another; a handful of earth which in the cyclic struggles . . . has been preserved by mere chance and has been violently . . . thrown into the eternal vortex of the universe. The stars are its confines . . . clothed in trailing vestments of fire . . . and sometimes in milder moments they have . . . a beneficent influence over us. . . . But when the meeting comes the dance will begin . . . there will be a struggle, and then farewell to our planet!

"Eternity, eternity! what shall we find over yonder . . . the borders of that new world? An ocean, turbid and restless, where for centuries to come . . . there is no title,

[1] There is similarity but no imitation. *Eloa* was written in 1823, *Demon* in 1829. Vigny's reputation had certainly not meanwhile penetrated to the Caucasus.

no name, where homeless . . . the stars roam after other stars. . . . Planted amidst silent choirs . . . what will the proud King of Creation do?" The piece ends by declaring this King "Terribly like a monkey!"

The inspiration is akin to that of the *Rolla* and *Namuna*, which appeared about the same time—an unbridled piece of cynicism frequently flippant, on Byronic lines. Where the poet appeals to me as being inimitable is in the many smaller pieces, sonnets resembling a tear-drop, masterpieces of burning tenderness and sadness. Less harmonious and less perfect than Pushkin, the verses of Lermontoff have at times a greater sense of sorrow.

"I know of immortals who only are a sob!"

Should ever a choice collection have to be made from among the poetry of the last century, some of his quatrains, known by heart all over Russia, would have to be retained. Such as, for example—

> "We have parted, but thine image
> On my heart I ever keep
> Like vision pale of better years
> 'Twill e'er rejoice my heart."

Again—

> "Though giv'n to newer passions
> I cannot cease to love him.
> Thus empty temple keeps a shrine
> And fallen idol is yet a god." [1]

But I am infringing on my resolution not to quote verse. I am reminded of it when I see how these precious pearls in a strange language appear dull and out of place.

Lermontoff's prose is quite equal to his poetry. Any one who has read the translation by M. X. Marmier of *Princess Mary* will no doubt appreciate the delicacy of that story. It is one of his brief sketches of Caucasian

[1] This thought is Chateaubriand's, ". . . The god is not abolished, 'cause of deserted temple . . ." (An essay on the death of Enghien.)

life collected under the title *A Hero of Our Times*. This hero, Pechorin, personifies the spirit of his age. He proclaims his disenchantment of the country he passes through, and yet judged by the spirited manner in which he describes it, it must have fascinated him. He unceasingly returns to it for his Satanic thoughts and pictures of desolation with which he fills his pages. Pechorin forgets, however, that even in the Caucasus, especially in the Caucasus, pessimism is not a new idea, for among its rocks, many centuries ago, Prometheus breathed forth his plaint against life and the gods.

III

After 1840 one seeks in vain for the chorus of poets who echoed Pushkin's voice. They are dispersed, silenced, or have vanished.

Batushkoff's flame extinguished itself in a madhouse; Delvig, having dared to pronounce himself in favour of the July revolution, was struck by Imperial disgrace. One dies of it even as Racine was killed by a look from Louis XIV. Baratinsky is subdued by sordid cares and sings no more. Yazikoff and Jukovsky became sterilized by the mysticism into which they plunged, and the last strident shrieks of Russian romanticism were given by Lermontoff. Arrived at those sublime heights the Byronic fever had to fall. Poesy, overdriven, now languishes and decays.

Within twenty years romanticism passed through the three ordained stages, applicable to Russia as to anywhere else. At first the frank and credulous child receives from Germany its nursery tales, in the form of ballads, fairy tales and mild stories of knights and mermaids. Soon enter the tumultuous passions of adolescence, and to the lyre's strings are added those of personality and sentiment.

It is England that strikes them first. It is the voice of her poet which leads the concert of maledictions. But despair alone is not a sufficient goad for the mind. Romanticism could not long continue in that lyric form—no more than passion at its crisis. In that guise, moreover, it had unconsciously become a reaction against the philosophic ideals of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of that century there arose certain prophets and apostles among men, who preached doctrines of happiness founded on reason, and the reign of virtue and of liberty—all of which was to be brought about by a metaphysical miracle. These men had thoroughly believed in this new myth and had followed its phantoms through the ruins of the past. In spite of all these fair promises, however, they discovered that men were still unable to control the passions that continued to wring their hearts and kept them enslaved. They either lapsed into despair or rebelled against fate. Hence the moans of the *Renés*, the wailings of *Childe Harold*, of the *Olympios* and the whole family of the disconsolates. Not one of them had perceived the true cause of all this evil—excepting that grand madman, Rolla, who indeed saw it clearly. To-day, after a hundred years of experience which have given that message the lie, we hardly even begin to understand that our pessimism and our discouragements proceed from the immense bankruptcy which attended that religious phase.

Russia has only very remotely been connected with our own aspirations and our disillusions. There more than elsewhere the declamations of desolation in an *Onegin* or those of a Pechorin seem artificial and acquired; it was best to renounce them.

The new spirit had created a special kind of rhetoric which required something more substantial to work upon. Weary of soaring up on high, in imaginary spheres, romance sought the firmer footing afforded by history. Writers of elegies and ballads turned towards the historic drama,

and towards the more picturesque scenes of popular life. Byron was forsaken, and Shakespeare was resorted to as being the universal saviour.

The Russians discovered their "Middle Age" at the same time that we found our own. Pushkin gave himself entirely to this revival of the past, as shown in *Boris Godunoff* and his poems written when in his prime. His disciples followed him on the same road, in the same way as with us were followed the creators of *Henry III*, of *Marion Delorme* and of *Notre Dame de Paris*.

These two movements were so simultaneous as to exclude all thought of one being an imitation of the other. All over Europe the same causes produced the same effects. But as the rhetoric of the new school was quite as conventional as that of the classics it equally perverted the new imagery produced.

The exasperating personality of the writer which was at the bottom of the romantic style could not efface itself sufficiently so as to allow the people of another age, living under different conditions, to speak for themselves in their own way. The writers gave to their creations their own personal doctrines and sentiments. They had themselves before pleaded against the ancient methods, and had dwelt on the necessity of adhering to the realities. Their own denunciations now recoiled and reacted upon themselves, and should have restrained their imagination.

There was another reason for slightly delaying the success of romanticism. In Russia, the literary movement of 1830 was purely æsthetic, confined to the enjoyment of art as an art—and to quarrels regarding its forms. It afforded no satisfaction whatsoever to the social and moral needs of a country thirsting for reforms and ideas as to all that was necessary for solving the social problems which had begun to present themselves. The advent of Romanticism presented the illusion of a war of principles, for when reading the periodicals and reviews of that

period (the daily press was then of no account) one is immediately deafened by the din of battle. To all his many other interests Pushkin had added that of journalism. In the organs such as the *Moscow Messenger* and the *Literary Gazette*, directed by him at intervals, the traditions of classical forms were vigorously attacked. But, after all, these polemics are only suited to the leisure hours of the higher intellects, the *dilettanti*. They do not touch the larger and more serious interests of life.

Moreover the different schools of philosophy divided and inflamed the youthful mind. The question, for instance, of the emancipation of the serfs raised by Alexander I weighed heavily on the national conscience. Many people showed great anxiety as to what part Russia would eventually take in the course of humanity's progress. Of all this romanticism takes no heed. It moans and writes, but only as regards the emancipation of style and the correct constitution of the drama. A people, especially a suffering and an expectant people, cannot long be fed on rhetoric alone. It leaves that luxury to the drawing-rooms and the men of letters, for whom it is an agreeable pastime.

Romanticism dwelt in the highest social strata without striking root in any of the soil below. The first voice to demand more virile sentiments would assuredly strike the death-knell of this aristocratic and artificial phenomenon.

This voice was that of Chayadayeff, in his famous *A Philosophic Letter* written in the year 1836. Chayadayeff was a well-educated man of the world, a thorough gentleman and much in request in society; one of those carpet philosophers fond of paradox and criticism so numerous in Moscow. He was always careful, however, not to commit himself—and was clever at getting himself out of scrapes. The cardinal idea in that *Letter* was the proposition that until then Russia had been but a superfluous branch of the European tree. A rotten branch, moreover,

because it had taken its sap from the Byzant, which was useless to civilization, by reason of having during its religious development kept itself aloof from the "Middle Ages" of the West, and later from the enfranchisement of the lay mind of modern society. He declared that the Eastern Church was practically dead—and without any strength left to guide the national life. His words are—

"Alone in the world, we have given it nothing and received nothing. We have not added one idea to the treasury of human thought—we have in no way helped in perfecting human reason and we have vitiated everything that reason communicated to us. Our very blood contains principles hostile and impervious to civilization. . . . We grow but we do not ripen." . . .

Here, from the lips of a Russian, is voiced the accusation so often made against Russia by her detractors. And he was not singular in that view. Before many years had passed away many responding echoes are heard. Belinsky wrote—

"We are people without a fatherland, and what is worse—a people deluded into the belief of having one."

And Turgeneff, turning to one of his own people, made the biting remark: "The samovar is all we have been capable of giving to the world, and that too is probably not our own invention." Such home-truths were never thought possible.

The agitation caused in Moscow and elsewhere by that "Letter" was considerable, and though the philosopher had abstained from all criticism of "official Russia,"[1] the counter blow was nevertheless a heavy one. The *Telescope*, which had inserted the letter, was suppressed, the editor was exiled to Vologda, the official censor was

[1] A euphonism applied to the Government when having nothing particularly agreeable to say of it. It is used in the same sense as, with us fifteen years ago, the words "the executive power" in lieu of saying "the Emperor."

dismissed. The warrant issued against the author ran, "As the 'Letter' could not have been written except by a man not quite of sound mind, Chayadayeff will be temporarily placed in charge of a specialist who will visit him every day." This curious punishment lasted a month.

One of the consequences of all this was, that Herzen and the Radical opposition proclaimed Chayadayeff as their "true father." They forced the meaning of his *Philosophic Letter*, making it appear a cry of religious negation, and meant as a political pamphlet. The author was thus represented as a sceptic and a revolutionary, and to have struck the first note.

At this time Kant, Schelling and Hegel were being translated, and a large number of Russian students went to the German universities, there to acquire a thorough knowledge of Rationalism. These men formed the generation of 1840, and were of those who received the baptism of the "troubled waters." They returned completely transformed. The intoxication of sentiment, which had characterized the former generation was now succeeded by an orgy of metaphysics. Fashion forsook the "wave of passion and sentiment" for "pure reason." This new hobby-horse was ridden with the fury habitual to the Russian. The hairs which the Germans split into four were at Moscow split into eight, and it became a period of sublime political doctrinarianism. It will be shown later how this furnished weapons on either side for the defence of contending and contradictory theories, and how Russia consequently became divided into two antagonistic schools of thought. One writer especially became remarkable for his novel ideas, and assumed the leadership of the Liberal school, and it did not take long for him to control literature as a whole. This was the critic Belinsky.

His enemies described him as "a dreamer drunk with ink." This was not an exaggeration if applied to him as a politician—Dieu! what a grand word to apply to

him or to anybody in Russia in the days of Nicholas!—or to the versatile philosopher, a plaything of his own abstract imagination, whose caperings through the mists of radicalism we shall more closely observe later on. But nevertheless he rendered some good service at the outset whilst still belonging to "the Hegelistic right" and as long as he kept on purely literary ground. Belinsky is probably the only critic worthy of the name in that country.

The Russian mind is naturally inclined towards criticizing, but it seldom adopts the methods of impartiality and largeness of view with which our masters have accustomed us. In every criticism—or "review," as they call it there—which fill the newspapers it would be a miracle to find a "happy mean" between the bare statements of fact, the pedantic dissertations of the professor and the impassioned pleading of counsel. The fault possibly may be attributed to the nature of their politics. With them politics are invariably discussed under the cover of philosophical disputations, and as politics have no right to appear unveiled, they insinuate themselves into the literary themes and promptly lead these astray.

Belinsky also went wrong for a while in this particular way, but redeemed himself somewhat by exercising a strong interest in spiritual matters and by possessing a deep-seated intelligence, good erudition and a sense of justice. This indefatigable writer has left a voluminous production, a veritable encyclopædia of Russian literature. In some parts, it is cumbersome and prolix, but otherwise replete with ideas in connection with the slightest indication regarding the national genius, past and present. It is the same kind of work which was carried out by us, and at about the same time conjointly by Villemain and Sainte-Beuve. His was carried out single-handed. It consists chiefly in winnowing the chaos of their ancient literature, and with rare ability giving the new a right direction.

He was the first who dared to upset many of the idols of antiquity and to destroy the fetish of infallibility commonly attributed to the classical writers. Notwithstanding his admiration for Pushkin, he put his finger on the weak spots of romanticism. He examined the corpse, still warm, in terms to which even at the present time no objection could be made. In fact he fully possessed the power of divining the real needs of his age. He founded and watched over that " realistic school " whence emanated the great novelists of modern Russia. In drafting its syllabus, soon after 1849,—and this is important—he showed himself to be the first Russian who had advanced even beyond the literary developments in the West!

I borrow a few lines from his studies on the poets of romance in the year 1843. They clearly indicate how the public feeling at that period was one of weariness and full of expectation for something new. In quoting Belinsky, I must acknowledge that I share his views. His indisputable authority, however, will no doubt protect me from the reprobation of those Russians who might consider my intrusion on the national aspect of Pushkin's genius as exaggerated. Belinsky writes—

" Sorrow, discontentment, the ideal, celestial virgins, the moon, human hatred, love, youth, treachery, the dagger and poison—have for many a long day been written and re-written about, also by Pushkin and by his imitators. But now you will no longer be read if you only intend to astonish by mere audacity of phrase, by mere sonorous brilliancy of verse, by dithyrambic effusions in honour of black-eyed damsels and of the orgies of youth . . . the age of youthful eccentricities has passed away, that of deep thinking has arrived. The public has grown exacting. Of a truth it does not know precisely what it wants, but it is no longer satisfied with what is placed before it. The public has not yet quite got to know itself—but it is near doing so. Magnificent imagery and mere claptrap phrase-

ology fascinate no longer. They will not even be listened to again.

"No one can have a doubt as to the existence of a purely Russian literature, but every one has the right to demand that it should be examined with a cool judgment, and that it be appreciated at its proper value. Everybody has a right to a smile when it is pretentiously compared with that of other countries. Pushkin's existence is certainly sufficient to convince us that we have a literature of our own, but we can also proudly point to other sources for its proof.

"Russian literature undoubtedly has also a history of her own and its logical sequences, but we must ever remember that from the first it was but a graft, and that for a long while it lived the artificial life of a hothouse. It is only recently, only a very few years ago, that it began to take root in Russian soil, and up to the present how small is that plot in which it can find room to grow![1] What connection is there between our poesy current to-day and that of the poesy of the people? Not only are they not of the same parentage, but they utterly ignore each other! Read one of Pushkin's pieces to a well-to-do merchant—not to a mere peasant—and see what he says to you."[2]

Elsewhere Belinsky again writes—

"Pushkin's tales testify to his having attempted to imitate popular poesy. He took the wrong road."[3]

The first novels written by Gogol—whose appearance coincided in time with that of Lermontoff's last verses—reveals to Belinsky the advent of the new art whose birth he had predicted. He forthwith declared that the age of

[1] Belinsky later on gives a detail of some interest: "With us it is exceptional for a work to sell 500 copies, 700 at the most. If the work comes out in the periodical it may possibly have a million readers."

[2] *On Literature in 1843*, vol. viii.

[3] *Studies on Pushkin*, vol. viii, p. 700.

lyrical poesy had passed away never to return, and the reign of the novel had commenced. Time has justified this prophecy.

In complete harmony with this great writer who was able to revivify Russia with his work, which carries in its womb Russia's literary future—we have touched upon the real object of these studies; it therefore behoves us to give it a little closer attention.

In this brief sketch I have given up to the time of Gogol we have seen the efforts of the Russian spirit to find itself, its clumsy imitations and its first successes. For a long time it was running after us, and eventually caught us up, then it actually passed and preceded us along certain lines.

Russia appears to us like an immense mirror capable only of reflecting the images which we have set before it—images sometimes confused and unwelcome, at other times luminous and fascinating. Dating from Pushkin, they undergo magnificent transformations, to such a degree that we begin to suspect that the glass contains creative properties of its own. But as yet we hesitate about accepting this idea, for we still recognize some of our own distinctive marks and gestures in the strange figures which the mirror holds up to our admiration. Hereafter it will possibly show us figures quite unknown to us. These will no longer come from without; they will at last spring from their native land. They will testify to the existence of a rich and nourishing soil under that white sheet of snow which till now we thought covered but the sterility of a delusion.

As already proclaimed by Belinsky, it is the Russian Novel that will complete this change.

CHAPTER III

THE REALISTIC AND NATIONAL EVOLUTION. GOGOL

The novel in Russia is of humble origin, and its history prior to 1840 was neither long nor brilliant. The first of its kind was published in 1799 by one Ismailoff, bearing the title *Eugene; or, The Result of a Bad Education.* The characters were Russian, both in name and in their habits. The background was that of the actual locality. Karamsin wrote his novels soon after. They were just simple and sensational short stories, and we have already noticed the success of his *Poor Lizzie.*

The fabulous success of Sir Walter Scott could not fail to provoke imitations. We come across some of these already in 1820, in the historical novels written by Bulgarin, Grech and Zagoskin. The least forgotten of these was *Yuri Miloslavsky,* by the last-named author.

These attempts received but a passing favour, for the lyric poesy supervened and occupied all the " place in the sun." The creators of romanticism came only incidentally in contact with fiction in prose. Pushkin's short stories, though often drawn from national history, still belong to the former school. They are models of classical composition; vivid but imaginary episodes, rather than studies of daily life. In the *Heroes of our Times* Lermontoff draws nearer to our modern ideals, but Pechorin, like all his contemporaries, is too much occupied with his own lamentations to concern himself closely with the affairs of those around him.

Among the lesser lights, I find Marlinsky and his

imitators, those clever romancers whose privilege it had been between 1830 and 1840 to bring copious tears into the eyes of Russia's daughters. It is always necessary for some one to make young girls cry, but to do so requires no special ability.

Marlinsky had taken Ducray-Duminil and the Vicomte d'Arlincourt as his models, for his own grasp of the sentimental went no further. To peruse them again to-day one would have to possess the freshness of illusion, such as is only now met with in the lecture room of Tamboff.

Most people were as weary of the historic and pseudo-popular novel as of the recent lyrical debauch, with its superhuman heroes. Other writers were to come who would find pleasure in the experiences of life, and who would study these independently of their own preconceived notions. Some indications of their approach were already noticeable. The field of romance having been taken from them, they of necessity had to try their hands at something else. They cropped up all over the world simultaneously for a similar purpose, unknown to each other, and without a thought of imitating one another. Of such were Dickens and Balzac in the West, and Gogol in Russia.

We shall note how the latter gradually separated himself from his surroundings. He did not at the outset create a novel delineating character and customs as we understand it to-day, or as his rivals in other countries had already succeeded in doing, but in his original compositions, difficult to classify, he collected many of these essential materials for his successors. Even in their stereotyped frames they held new pictures, which the Russians at once recognized as reflecting their own spirit and their own features.

It was Mérimée, however, who made the name of Gogol first known in France. With his habitual sagacity he also told her what there was to admire in Russia's first novelist.

Mérimée, however, was only partly acquainted with his friend's work, but that was sufficient for him to recognize a rare literary talent. We want more of it. Our curiosity in the man is excited, for through man the secrets of the race are disclosed. The writer whose work has the sanction of his compatriots appears to us as a guardian to whom a nation has for a little while entrusted its soul. What is this soul's desire at this moment? What historical rôle is the guardian going to play? To what extent has he prepared himself for making the required change?

I purpose to find the answers to these questions in the books written by Gogol, for they contain the impassioned controversies which raged during the last half century.[1]

Gogol hailed from Little Russia, and was Cossack born. To the Russian reader such a simple statement of fact is sufficient. It entirely reveals the inner man, and curtly foretells that salient feature of his individuality as revealed in his writings—a character of mischievous good humour overlying a foundation of melancholy.

To understand Gogol, the particular native country, the soil that gave him birth, must be known. It is the Ukraina, known then as the frontier—lying midway between and subject to both the influences of Russia's extreme north and extreme south. There for some months the sun takes complete possession, and brings forth miracles. Then it is the East: by day bright sunshine and vast areas of verdure covered with enchanting flowers; mild nights, with a sky covered with enchanting stars. The fertile soil yields extraordinarily abundant harvests. With the universal rejuvenescence of spring, life is easy and made full of joy. The Great Magician has removed sadness with the melting of the snow; men become more energetic and more subtile,

[1] His complete works. 4 vols. in 8vo. Moscow, 1880. Published by Hagen. Also biographies and essays on Belinsky, Polevoy, Shevireff, Shebalsky.

their spirits rise to enjoy all the happiness of which they are capable; and their lips wreathed in smiles break with loud bursts of laughter.

It is a country of sunshine—but also one of boundless plains. The absence of a defined horizon produces feelings of anxiety, and diminishes the enjoyment of observation. The unknown is never pleasant.

The thoughts of the mind are usually influenced by what is seen by the eye. That distant void attracts it, and it roams about in empty spaces without being able to settle on a definite point. It is like the flight of a bird, at first clearly seen, and steadily watched as it grows smaller in the distance, till it finally disappears into the blue. It is thus the man of the steppes acquires the tendency of staring at nothing, and, lost in dreams, soars long in his own imaginations. The "Little Russian" is not unlike his brother of the provinces and Brittany. But with the winter he becomes once more purely Russian.

The winter on the Dnieper is quite as cold as on the Neva. There is nothing to check the strong wind and the snow-blasts from the north, as they resume possession of these lands. Death quickly counteracts the effects of the life-giving sun. Earth and man become torpid. As the Ukraina was once conquered and subdued by the Moscovite armies, so in like manner is she every year re-conquered by the Moscovite climate and thus equalizes the hardship to be endured in all the provinces. The physical conditions of this battlefield seem to have compelled its political conditions. Both these, in their own way, are the causes for Little Russia possessing a pronounced characteristic of her own.

She subdued the Turk, but by reason of long intercourse with her, she has retained much of the oriental. Later she was drawn into Poland's agitated course, and this "Italy of the North" impressed on her ancient vassal something of

her own splendid and turbulent habits. Finally Cossack intrigues inspired her with republican aspirations. The " Little Russian " dates his most cherished traditions from these times, which mark his true origin, founded on liberty and acts of daring. The Zaporog Cossacks were a Christian order of chivalry, recruited from among fugitive serfs. They were always at war with everybody, having no laws but that of the sword. Among the families descended in direct line from this original stock—and Gogol was of them—one frequently finds the inherited spirit of independence, the wandering tendency and the taste for adventure and for the marvellous.

We were obliged just to point out the complex elements of this half-southern spirit, so much more jovial, quicker and larger-minded than that of " Great Russia," but it is left to Gogol, the writer, to make it triumphant in the literature of his day, with all the truthfulness of one who, loving his native soil with all his heart, gathers his information from every source. The first half of his work is but the record of the life in the Ukraina.

Nicolas Vassilyevich (Gogol) was born in 1809 at Sorochinsky, near Poltava, in the very centre of the " Black country," the ancient home of the Cossacks. He received his first education from his grandfather. The old veteran had been the " Regimental Secretary " in the Zaporog regiment. This military title had no connection whatever with the pen of a scribe, it was merely an honorary dignity in the republican militia. The child was cradled in the inexhaustible legends of the great wars with Poland, and of the deeds of the free-lances of the steppes. The young mind became filled with these stories of military tragedies and the paradisaic countryside. Gogol has repeatedly told us that these legends have been handed down almost intact in the *Cottage Evenings*, and specially in the poem of *Taras Bulba*. What the child learnt from his grandfather came to him also in another form when listening to the

Khubzars, those popular rhapsodies, the Ukraina epics set to music. In these surroundings everything spoke to him of a fabulous age about to disappear, and of a primitive poetry still alive. When some artist embodies this poetry floating about in the air he breathes it will appear to have been split—as if passing through a prism—into two distinct phases; one for the aged, in which the narrator is filled with regrets of the past; the other for the young, who is dazzled by what he hears.

It seems then that these were the " primary classes " attended by Gogol, and the most profitable to him. After this he was sent to the gymnasium at Nyejin, where he was taught Latin and the foreign languages. According to his biographers he was a wretchedly bad school-boy. Biographers as a rule are only too glad to adorn the biographies of their great men with this fact. It spells victory for them. But it must not be spoken too loud, for it might be heard in the colleges! Moreover, whatever the lapses in Gogol's primary education, he made up for it later. All his contemporaries testify to the great extent of his reading, and to his intimate acquaintance with the literature of the East. The letters he wrote to his mother before leaving school already show us the quality of his mind. He had the gift of close observation,—satirically expressed at the expense of his comrades,—a fund of deep-felt sympathy, as also a strong desire for a great future. Occasionally the flight of his high ambitions is troubled by sudden fits of discouragement. His letters occasionally show mental depression. When he is violently declaiming against the injustice of men, one can trace the influence of his first readings in romanticism and the Byronic contagion of that epoch.

" I feel," so writes the young enthusiast, " the impulse within me to undertake a great and noble task, for the good of my country, for the happiness of my fellow-citizens

and all my equals. . . . My spirit sees an angel sent from heaven imperiously calling it towards the object of its aspirations." . . .

No doubt our twenty-year-old pessimists will smile at these bombastic words, but in another half-century they themselves will be laughed at, and with less indulgence. Woe to the men who have never had any faith in life's illusions, who cannot be warmed by its noblest ideals, and remain satisfied with the heartlessness of fallen manhood ! The flame of life itself can only exist by perpetual burning, and everything exists only by perpetual combustion !

In the days of the Emperor Nicholas any Russian who wished to make himself useful to his fellow creatures had no choice of methods. The only way was by entering the Government service and to work one's way up the different stages in the Administration. Since Peter the Great this Chinese kind of officialdom drew in all the best talents in the nation. Gogol, after having passed the entrance examinations, left for St. Petersburg. His private letters tell us of this event. It was the year 1829, when he was twenty years of age. Light of purse, rich in illusions, he entered the capital, as did his forefathers the Zaporogs when entering a conquered village, persuaded that by merely stretching out a bold hand they could acquire everything they had a fancy for.

What a strange spectacle it is to see a man fashioning himself for the work to which he is appointed by destiny ! Watch the mysterious working of the unformed will, in its frantic efforts to weave aright the threads into history's vast frame.

Here we have a penman commissioned to guide the mind's evolution, for tearing away literature from the realms of fancy and to bring it back into the field of life's realities. This man was given a goodly number of visions, a rich supply of lofty imagination, in fact, all that is

wanted to strengthen the wings of poesy; and now behold Fate forcing him into a novitiate wherein to learn the hard lessons of mere dry facts!

In a few weeks Gogol completed his apprenticeship. Not only was nothing that he expected offered him, but as a provincial without influence he was everywhere denied. He learnt that a large town can be as inclement a desert as his native steppe. He had learnt to know of the portals deaf to the knocking of the aspirant; the vain promises, and all the passive social defences erected against the assaults of the newcomer. Then, becoming desperate, the Cossack's inherited blood, with its spirit of the adventurer, took hold of him. One day he received a sum of money from his mother for the payment of a mortgage on the home of his ancestors. Instead of taking it to the bank, Gogol jumps on board a ship just about to sail. Like a schoolboy inspired by the story of Robinson Crusoe, he wants to flee into the world, no matter where. The ship first touches at Lübeck. Gogol, indifferent, disembarks—just as he would have disembarked in the Indies. He loafs about in the town for three days, then returns to St. Petersburg, relieved of his money, cured of his folly, resigned to everything.

After many applications he obtains a humble appointment as a clerk in the Department of Crown Lands and Revenue. The year he spent in this office had a marked effect on his character. When copying the correspondence of his sectional chief, he saw the whole Russian bureaucracy before him. The character of the Chinovniks (the officials) engraved itself on his memory. He studied the monster which was to haunt his work. He saw there standing before him in the flesh, Akaky Akakyevich, that melancholy hero who in *The Greatcoat* was to become the embodiment of this world's misery. Tired of this profession Gogol soon tried a few others. Believing himself to be a great actor, he offered his talents to the theatrical

authorities. They declared his voice to be wanting in power. The rejected comedian became a tutor in some of the aristocratic families of St. Petersburg, but without much success. At last, some friends had him appointed Professor of History in one of the universities. The new professor fired off all his shot in the inaugural address. After the second lecture the students failed to recognize him, for he only succeeded in sending them to sleep. After so many wreckings, this poor waif could not fail to have to take up literature! This is the universal refuge, the tomb of the Have-nots, the spring-board for the Have-alls —more often the former.

A few timid essays, published anonymously in the newspapers, had brought the young man a certain connection. Pletneff encouraged him, and Jukovsky introduced him to Pushkin. Gogol tells us with what palpitation he rang at the door of the great poet. He was still asleep, having been awake all night. The ingenuous youth apologized for having given trouble to so hard a worker, but the flunkey assured him that his master had passed the night playing cards. That was indeed a disillusion. The imitator of Byron did not spare his admirers! But the reception was so cordial! If Pushkin has done much for Russian literature it is perhaps more by his kind-heartedness than by his masterpieces. Without envy, generous with his overflow of brilliant ideas, it was as natural to him to enjoy the successes of others as it is for any one to see the sun shining on every flower at the same time. The true stamp of genius is to be found in the heart. His warm sympathies, full of encouragement and praise, has encouraged legions of writers. Between ourselves, Gogol, his first choice, remained his favourite. I will show later what part the poet Pushkin played in the masterpieces of Gogol, the prose writer.

Pushkin advised him first to deal with subjects drawn from the nation's history and from the habits and customs

of its people. Gogol accepted that advice, and wrote the *Evenings in a Cottage.*

II

In this book, *Evenings in a Cottage near Dikanka,* the young author brings before us all his childhood, all his love for his native Ukraina, laying bare his whole heart. An old man, a keeper of bees, is supposed to be relating his stories on an evening. He prattles at random, but Little Russia opens out before us in all its aspects : the countryside, the peasants, pictures of rustic customs, dialogues in the idioms of the people, legends terrible and grotesque. Two sufficiently contradictory elements are embodied in these recitations—mirth and fantasy. There is much devilry—too much. The Evil One, under the disguises of witches, mermaids and ghastly spectres of the drowned, continually passes to and fro, frightening the villagers. But they are not taken too seriously. The merriment carries it off, and leaves them sane and sound. There is nothing yet of that sardonic grin which is soon to curl Gogol's lips. Only the good and frank laugh of the young Cossack, gorged with basins of gruel, basking in the sun while listening to " tall stories " his countryman boastfully applies to himself. Stories of youthful scrapes, of tricks played on the Jews, or on the village authorities, of Rabelaisian drinking bouts, ending in fisticuffs. All this is told in unctuous and well-seasoned language, full of local words, of naïve and slangy phrases, of those endearing diminutives which alone render its translation into a more formal language an impossibility. At times the style becomes more elevated and more refined. A flood of poesy carries the author away when he sees before him the scenery in which he grew up.

In that strain he begins his *Night in May.* " Do you know the Ukraina night ? Oh ! you know it not, the

Ukraina night! Imagine it. From the midst of the sky the moon looks down. The infinite vault seems to expand. It glows and palpitates. The earth is covered with a silvery light, the air is fresh, and yet it is oppressive, charged with languor and perfume. Night divine! Enchanting night! Motionless and pensive, the gloomy forests throw out their lengthened shadows. Here and there are silent pools, with waters dark and cold, sadly imprisoned within the verdant foliage of the gardens. The virgin forests of wild cherry trees and sloes timidly risk their tender roots into the cooling water. Now and then the leaves rustle and murmur, as if shivering in a fit of anger at being blown about and caressed by the gently gliding breezes of the night. All below is fast asleep. Above, yonder, everything is alive, all is majestic and triumphant. And in the soul, as in the skies, there open out spaces infinite, and in their depths silvered visions gracefully appear. Night Divine! Night entrancing!

"Suddenly all is alive; forest, pool and steppe. The glorious trills of the Ukraina nightingale ring out! It seems as if the moon itself stood still among the clouds to listen. On the hill the village sleeps the slumber of the bewitched. The clusters of whitewashed cottages shine with greater brilliancy from the rays of the moon. Their low walls show up dazzling in the night.—The songs have ceased. Then all is again at rest among these drowsy people. But here and there a small window shows a light. On the hearth of a hut, a belated family cooks its supper."

The very next line takes us abruptly away from these restful contemplations, and plunges us into the noisy excitements of a country dance. The turbulent fellows rush to thrash the village elder, hidden in a sack at his godmother's.

In the middle of this boisterous night the scene changes suddenly once more; the spirit of the mists rises out of her

watery bed; she confuses, then ends the adventure by her sorceries. At other times, between two peals of laughter, a deep sigh escapes the old story-teller. This is a characteristic of these people about whom Gogol justly remarks : " They pour their gaiety into their song, but ever pierce it with a note of sadness." Look at the epilogue to the first of these stories, *The Fair of Sorochinsky*. The long line of carts are leaving the market-place; the shouting and singing has ceased as they move along the road.

" Thus joy, that beautiful but inconstant visitor, forsakes us. In vain does a solitary voice attempt a note of gladness, for its echo brings back only grief and weariness. It dies of sadness on hearing itself. Thus also do the gay companions of one's free and boisterous youth separate one by one, and they spread over the face of the earth and in the end forsake their solitary brother in his old age. Sad is such parting ! Sad and heavy the heart ! And nothing to uphold it ! " One can imagine how these contrasts give colour and movement to *The Evenings*.

The effect of the book was considerable. It had the additional merit of revealing a distant part of Russia which was as yet unknown. Gogol had at once obtained his footing. Pushkin, whose clear mind loved humour above all things, highly praised this book which had amused him. The Russians to this day consider its style as one of the best in their literature.

I feel obliged, however, to make some reservations. Is it because we are too old to enjoy nursery tales, or too morose to enter into the gaieties of others ? I cannot say, but notwithstanding all its good qualities, which I have already indicated, *The Cottage Evenings* does not impress me much. Its farce is frequently coarse, and neither in his nor in the disguised ridicule as adopted by the Cossack Scapin, can I recognize the great satirist who immortalized himself in his *Dead Souls*. Devilry can only charm us when it really alarms us.

Moreover, Gogol was very much under the influence of Hoffmann, whom he endeavoured to imitate in his mediocre novel *The Portrait.* But he did not possess the fantastic qualities of the German. Gogol's demons are quite good fellows, but a devil as a good fellow bores me. And again, alongside of the pages wherein the emotions of youth allow the pen its full liberty, there are others in which I can see the tricks of the professional "man of letters," who works up popular themes to his own liking. *The Evenings* remind me frequently of the Provençal troubadours. They have a similar charm, and also the desired artlessness and simplicity, which are also the stumbling-blocks of that style. Possibly there is between us and their enthusiastic readers of 1832 only a difference of point of view. To them that book was a striking advance, owing to its frankness and freedom from affectation. To us it is behind the times, moreover suspected of aspiring into the field of romance. There is nothing more difficult than to assess the exact value of any work of art which has become antiquated, and when it comes to making such an experiment in the works belonging to another country, the matter becomes an impossibility. The Russian may pardon me one indication which certainly is not a comparison, and I will sum up my critics and answer them at the same time by a simple question. Do you find the *Lady in White* amusing? Of course you do. It amuses nearly all respectable people. In that case, you will find some amusement with Gogol's "ladies of the lake," and will find nothing to skip in the *Evenings in a Cottage.*

In 1834 he gave his readers a serial story with the title of *Tales of Mirgorod.* That was his settlement of account with romanticism. He takes leave of sorcery in his *Viy*—that nightmare of slavonic legend. In it a beautiful damsel bewitches her admirers. Any one who dares to touch her little foot is slowly consumed and destroyed with a pinch of red hot cinders. The simple

people of the Ukraina credit Satan with having this power. The possessed damsel has singled out a Bachelor of Divinity. About to die, she implores him to read the Prayers for the Dead three nights running over her body laid out in the church. For the first time Gogol succeeded in imparting a sense of real terror in the struggle between the unfortunate Bachelor of Divinity and the maiden spectre. It is a fine ghost story, which makes one's flesh creep.

The chief work of this collection is *Taras Bulba.* It at once ensured the writer's celebrity. *Taras* is an epic in prose. It is a poem on the life of the Cossack of ancient times. Gogol found himself in the happy circumstances denied to all modern epic writers. For when borrowing the framework and the usual methods sanctioned since the days of Homer, he was able to see and feel them in a country, in the people and in the customs around him which presented the greatest resemblance to those of the Homeric world. He obtained the impressions about which he wrote direct from his immediate surroundings, and had himself witnessed the death of these wrecks from the Middle Ages. As he says, he only re-edited the narratives of his ancestor —himself a witness and actor of that Iliad. At the time the poet was writing, half-a-century had barely elapsed since the disbandment of the Zaporog army, and the last war with Poland, where Cossack and Pole had revived the exploits, the licence and the ferocity of those splendid fellows who fought in the days of Bogdan.

This war gave the keynote to the dramatic action, that is, the plot of the drama. The old Taras, by his rough and bold qualities, embodies the legendary type of the steppe adventurers. The Zaporogs in revolt on behalf of their Faith—and loot—go forth to meet their hereditary enemy. Taras recalls his two sons from the Kieff University, and brings them to the camp situated on an island in the Dnieper. With him we enter into the daily life of

this republic of savages. We follow him to the battle-field, and with him we lay siege to and sack Polish villages. He then brings us to Warsaw, where a Jew takes him, disguised, to witness the execution of his own son, a prisoner. He terrifies us with the acts of vengeance for his son's murder. His own death symbolizes the end of the glory and the liberty of the Cossacks, which is now for ever buried in the tomb of their last Ataman. Such is the canvas on which the poet, with great prodigality, paints the picturesque descriptions and divers incidents which enter into the composition of an epic.

We owe to Mr. Viardot a reliable version of the *Taras Bulba*, one which at least gives the foreigner an idea of the chief merits of the work, namely, a spirited representation of real history. It teaches us more about the Dnieper republic than any amount of lectures. What the translation, however, could not reproduce was the grandeur of its poetic style. Imagine *The Martyrs* translated into another tongue! It would require much courage to read it. The irreverent would say that a little is already necessary to approach the Russian original. But we are at present concerned with a language of which Mérimée has justly remarked : " It is the richest language of all in Europe. It is endowed with a marvellous gift for conciseness, coupled with clearness. One word suffices to connect several ideas which in another tongue would demand entire phrases. It is only the French language, based as it is on the Greek and Latin, and strengthened by all the northern and southern dialects—in fact, the language of Rabelais—that can give us an idea of its subtlety and force."

I feel bound to give my readers a page or two of this standard work, used in every public school in Russia. I shall adhere to the text as much as possible.

" The two sons have returned to the lodgings for one night only. At dawn the father is to take them to the camp.

Left alone, the mother could not sleep. Leaning over the bed of her beloved sons, resting side by side, she began to comb their disordered curls, intently gazing at them through her tears. Her whole being, her soul and mind, were centred in those looks. She could not be satisfied. She had nourished them at her breast, brought them up and spoilt them, and now—she is given only a few moments to look at them. 'My sons, my beloved sons! What will become of you? What is awaiting you?' So she murmured as the tears trickled through the wrinkles of a once beautiful face.

"She was indeed much to be pitied, as were all women in those turbulent times. She had lived on love for a while, during those first days of joyous abandonment to the passions of youth. Then her brutal seducer had abandoned her for his sword, his brother warriors and adventure. After that she only saw her husband two or three times a year, and often had no news of him for several years. And when she found him, and they lived together, what a life! She had to submit to many outrages, even to blows. The rare moments of tenderness and caress were but as doles of charity to this poor creature, who had strayed into this horde of soldier celibates whose brutal habits had given the Zaporog army such a bad name. She had seen her youth pass away, without its bringing to her any happiness. Her fresh cheeks and soft lips had faded without being kissed, and became prematurely wrinkled. Love, instinct, and all that was tender within her, were concentrated in her maternal longings. She brooded over her children with feverish anxiety, and love mingled with tears. She hovered over them as a gull of the steppe. And now they are being taken from her, these darlings—taken from her for ever! Who knows but that at the first encounter a Tartar will cut off their heads? She would never know what had become of their abandoned bodies, never know where the carrions were devouring their flesh. And for

every drop of their blood she would have given all hers! Trembling with grief, she gazed on their eyes which now mighty slumber was beginning to close. She said to herself 'Perhaps Bulba, when he awakes, will stay on a day or two. Possibly he was drunk when he decided to go so soon?'

"From the heavens above the moon's rays had for some time descended on the courtyard, on the groups of sleeping servants, and on the dense copses of willows and the fields of wild oats where stood the palisades of the enclosure. The mother was still seated at the head of her sons' bed, her eyes did not leave them for an instant. She did not think of sleep. Already the horses, scenting the morn, ceased to browse and raised their heads expectantly. The leaves near the tops of the trees began to rustle. Imperceptibly the gentle breeze shivered through the lower branches. From the steppe came the loud neigh of a pony —and suddenly red streaks illumined the sky.

"... When the mother saw her sons, already in the saddle, she threw herself at the youngest, whose face showed signs of sadness. She seized the stirrup and clung firmly to the saddle-bow, despair in her eyes. She would not let go. Two lusty Cossacks lifted her carefully and carried her into the house. But the moment they had crossed the threshold, she dashed passed them with the agility of a mountain goat unlooked for in such an old woman. With superhuman strength she stopped the horse; passionately, almost hysterically, embraced her son. She was again forcibly removed.

"The young Cossacks rode on in silence, restraining their tears, being afraid of their father. He, too, was troubled, though he did his best not to show his feelings. The day was raw; the trees stood out clearly; the birds' songs were all out of harmony. When the riders had gone some short distance they stopped to look back. The cottage seemed to have sunk into the ground. Only the

two chimneys were visible and the tops of the surrounding trees, in whose branches they had as children spent many a happy day climbing about like squirrels. Before their eyes lay only the great prairie, which held the story of their lives from the day when they rolled about in the dewy grass until the day when they went to meet a dark-eyed Cossack girl who, trembling, ran to meet them. There were the well, the long pole, and the cartwheel that served as a pulley. That is the last object seen in the empty sky! The further side of the ravine they had just cleared looked in the distance as large as a mountain and hid everything. . . . Farewell youth, frolics and happy memories! Farewell all and everything!"

Then follows that well-known passage describing the steppe—so well known that it is unnecessary for me to repeat it. I will only extract again a spirited picture of the Polish crowd assembled at Warsaw to witness the executions of the Cossacks. It reminds one of those historic pictures by those famous artists Brosiz and Matejko—so crowded with forms, and dazzling to the eye on account of their brilliant colouring. This passage is interesting because it indicates Gogol's special methods of great regard for detail, which become more and more characteristic of him and of all who belong to his school.

"The place of execution is filling by people coming from all sides. In this age of sudden death a public execution is the most favourite spectacle, not only for the masses but also for the upper classes. No one can resist its attraction; neither the religious orders—and they were always there in large numbers—nor the timid young girls. The nightmare of these bleeding corpses is ever with them. They jump up at night with yells akin to those of a drunken trooper. 'How horrible!' many of them cry out, shuddering as if in a fit of ague. They shut their eyes, turn the head—but stay. A man, with mouth wide open and hands extended, gets on to the shoulders

of his neighbours to obtain a better sight, and out of the mass of common looking heads, mostly narrow and of indistinctive features, protrudes the head of a butcher. He criticizes the operations from the point of view of a professional, and exchanges his impressions with a gunsmith whom he addresses as his brother, because on a recent fête day they had both got drunk together in a pothouse. Some are occupied in heated argument, others are laying the odds, but the majority is composed of that kind of people who look out on the world and all that passes around them with their fingers in their noses. In the first row, close up to the bearded sergeants of the city militia, stands, judged by the military cut of his clothes, a gentlemanly looking fellow. He has literally placed all he is possessed of on his back. A torn shirt and a pair of old boots is all that he has left in an empty garret. Round his neck are two chains, one over the other, from which is suspended a silver coin. He is accompanied by his dame, Eusice, a lady of quality, who is chiefly occupied in keeping her silk dress from becoming dirty. He explains everything to her with such an amount of detail that there would be some difficulty in finding anything to add. 'Look, my sweet darling little Eusice. All these people you see have come here with the object of seeing the way these condemned are going to be executed. That man there, my beloved, who holds in his hands an axe and other implements, is the executioner. It is he who is going to do the business. Whilst being broken on the wheel and during the other tortures he undergoes, the man will still be alive, but when his head is chopped off, my sweet, he will die instantly. At first you will hear him cry out and struggle, but as soon as he is decapitated he will not be able to cry out any more, neither eat nor drink because, you see, my own sweet soul, he is without his head.' Eusice listens with curiosity and fear to all these explanations.

" The roofs of the houses are black with people standing on them. Through the garret windows quaint figures with long mustaches and with a head-dress like a bonnet are peering out. On the draped balconies the aristocratic world is seated. On the balustrade rests the lily-white hand of a smiling Polish beauty. The illustrious lords and ladies, all of fine presence, look on in a dignified manner. A footman covered with gold braid, his long sleeves floating behind him, is continually handing round dainty dishes and refreshing drinks. Occasionally a little black-eyed minx seizes a handful of cakes and throws them at the people below. The crowd of horsemen, dying with hunger, smartly hold out their bonnets. A yeoman, a head taller than the others, dressed in a claret-coloured cassock covered with faded gold braid, thanks to the length of his arm is the first to catch the welcome food. He kisses his prize, places it to his heart and then into his mouth. A hawk, imprisoned in a gilt cage hanging from the balcony, also takes a part in the proceedings. Standing on one claw, beak on one shoulder, he is attentively watching the people. All at once there is a stir amongst the crowd, and the cry is heard, " They are coming, the Cossacks ! Here they are ! "

Taras, hidden in the crowd, has seen his son die. He returns to the solitudes of his beloved south sullen and grieving.

" Taras went out hunting on the steppe near the sea coast. But he missed everything. Sorrowfully he laid down his gun and sat down, remaining motionless a long while, with his head bent, and continually murmuring, ' O, my Ostap ! O, my Ostap ! ' Far away the waters of the Black Sea glistened. From a distant copse came the cry of a sea-mew. On the silvery beard fell the tears one by one."

The poem has a magnificent ending. It describes the death of Taras, the Roland of the Ukraina, overcome by

numbers, and his eloquent prophesy that Russia shall yet gather the spirit of the Cossack people and avenge their defeat. It is indeed of a very high order. But it is not throughout of the same quality. The romantic part is frankly bad. It is mere literary patchwork, without the shadow of personal feeling, and quite in the latest troubadour style. The portrait of the beautiful Polish woman on whose account Bulba betrayed his brethren is to be seen in an engraving dated 1830, and the love scenes are found everywhere on the tapestries of that day, and are mere counterparts of a Romeo and his Juliet !

Oh ! these literary exercises ! They are just what makes us distrust some of the best scenes in this epic. Those single combats, the personal prowess of the Cossack chiefs in the fighting throngs . . . we know them well. However much we may pile on the local colour and "russify" the description of two armies standing still to witness the single combats of certain heroes, we shall always think of them as Achilles or Hector, Æneas, or Turnus. The mischief is that the pattern is too commonplace. M. Guizot, an acknowledged authority in these matters, lately declared that in his opinion *Taras Bulba* is the only epic worthy of the name in modern times. I am of the same opinion, but is it really necessary to write an epic at all ?

The pleasure derived from this style of literature is due to a taste acquired at college where its " beauties " are insisted on and taught by the learned and there becomes a second nature, too often at the cost of deadening the innate nobler feelings of the soul for the higher things.

Even the descriptions of the country or landscape themselves—which in the *Taras* are the most sincere—do not correspond entirely with our views of nature. One has but to compare these efforts with those of Turgeneff to note their studied effects. Both admire and are in touch with nature. But to the former artist she is but a model before an easel, to be placed in the required attitude. For

the latter the model has become a despotic mistress, whose every fancy is humbly executed. The differences I have tried to explain may be better understood by referring to examples taken from localities that are well known. Recall to mind the scenery depicted in *Atala;* then look how it is tortured in modern books, say for instance in *Dominique.* Between these two periods, the influences of the physical world on the human soul have grown nearly as much as between the days of *Phèdre* and that same *Atala.* The classics used nature merely as a background; the romanticist looked on it as a poetic lyre, giving melody to all his ardent sentiments. We have again reversed the parts. To-day it is man who is the instrument, who responds to the least breath of the great Pan. The modern man thus approaches the primitive man. He submits himself more and more to the mysterious powers of nature.

I have hesitated a little in dwelling so long on *Taras Bulba,* for I know with what pride the Russian looks on this work. I know well how its merits have been demonstrated from the professorial chair. I have tried my best, but am not convinced. Is it because we are too close, and that a reaction against the style is in full swing, or because I have no liking left for the epic itself? That, perhaps, is all that there is to be said. It may be a mere "idiosyncrasy," a term invented by the sagacious to justify a disinclination one cannot well explain.

We have now done with that period of doubt during which Gogol was finding his feet. In that same volume a short story throws light on the transformation which his talent underwent, and becomes a pledge as to the new line he was going to take up. The story is called *Small Landholders in the Past.* It is just a simple story, of Philemon and Baucis. These two good people merely serve as a pretext for making new descriptions of Little Russia; some merriment is heard, as also some devilment; but neither have any point. It is just the minute details of

life without any special interest, but with a vein of sadness so essential a factor to the Russian storyteller in which to put forth all his powers. The woman dies, and the old man is brought to the grave. All he can be made to say is : " And so we have buried her ! Why ? " Left alone, he cannot live any longer ; he succumbs. The study of this old man's idiotic grief is thirty or forty years before its time. Tolstoy might well have put his signature to the last few pages.

The writer of those pages, however, henceforth belongs to us. He now abandons romance in which he gloried and undergoes the most exacting trial which falls to the lot of the strong, inevitable for all writers who live in an age of transition, if not at all times—the cruel test of self-sacrifice. A man born to be a writer and loving his calling will always be strongly attached to the doctrines first imbibed in his youth. The first masterpieces that won his admiration are sacred to him. When he reaches maturity and sees the new generation inquiring after other gods, it is already much to ask for his sympathy with the new movement. How is it possible to ask him to outstrip them or to go one better ? But that is exactly how the matter stood with him. It was a question of forgetting and destroying what he loved, or of taking the lead in a movement of which he could not foresee the end. It is like tearing up a religion one is about to forsake. The majority decline to follow, and from among those who do more than one follows half-heartedly, and eventually returns to his old love. These are the conquered ones. The barque only carries those who have unchained her.

Gogol was amongst the latter. All that his native land had suggested to him, all that he had experienced and heard in his younger days, now deserted him, to be religiously embalmed with all the ancient rites in his *Night Watches* and in his *Taras*. Life was going to give him new experiences, demanding a new language of expression.

He will be seen continually tabulating these with the ardour and docility of a machine with which one transmits different forces. I know of few authors in whom one can better discern, than in this Russian, that special temperament and, if one may say so, that special nutriment essential to a writer of note. Such do not receive impressions merely for the sake of keeping them as do other men. The latter receive them once for all, to be assimilated and become part of the individual. They form a kind of slowly increasing treasure which will only disappear with the last pinch of dust of which they are composed. But with the penman it is quite different. Like a mirror, he has behind the crystal of his soul a kind of silvery veil which precludes them from passing through, but instead reflects them intact as soon as taken up. He feels, he loves, and suffers only by right of being a poet, and is accountable to the community for all he receives. Nothing belongs to him, for he himself is nobody. He can keep nothing back of what he gets for nothing. His flatterers tell him that that is a most fortunate position to be in. They lie. It is the inferior and unfortunate position of the actor whose efforts are for others only, or of the debtor who is seized. But when one considers his organic function he may at least be excused, for I think he is more to be pitied than blamed if he has to wear himself out more quickly and to change his ideas, opinions and affections oftener than others.

III

In 1835 Gogol resigned his position at the University and definitely retired from the public service. "Here I am, once more a free Cossack," he writes about this date. It is the time of his greatest literary activity. He writes numerous stories, plays and essays on many different subjects, later published under the title of *Arabesques*.

We need waste no time over this collection. It is a haphazard conglomeration of some of the overflow of his ordinary work, critical essays, notes of the lectures on the Middle Ages, and a few chapters of still-born novels. The most remarkable of that lot is the *Diary of a Madman*. The author attempts to follow the reasonings of a decaying mind to its ultimate destruction.

His novels written at this time show him groping along the way towards realism. At times he succeeds in finding it, but at others he returns to his old ways in the realms of fantasy. Amongst his indifferent compositions *The Greatcoat* stands apart. The more I study the Russians the more I notice the truth of the comment made to me by one of them well acquainted with the history of their literature of the last three or four decades. "We have all come out from under Gogol's greatcoat." We shall see later to what extent it influenced Dostoyevsky's work. This awful writer is seen at his best in his first work, *Poor Folk*, and *Poor Folk* find their origin in *The Greatcoat*.

The sad hero, a scribe named Dyevushkin, is but an exaggerated study of Akaky Akakyevich, the caricatured type of the Government official created by Gogol. He is an affectionate character; one laughs at and yet pities him. At the beginning he is placed in the same attitude given to the two fellows Bouvard and Pécuchet created by Flaubert. To enhance the resemblance Akaky is a clerk with a soul and passion for mere copying! From this copying he derives many different and agreeable sensations. Certain letters were his favourites, and when he received them to copy he unmistakably showed his delight. One could identify them from the expression on his face whilst copying. One day his departmental chief gave him something in which the heading and part of the text had to be altered. It caused him so much effort that, wiping the sweat off his forehead, he eventually

said: "I can't do it; please give me something merely to copy." For him nothing existed beyond copying. We see him, in every particular, the very image of that idiot depicted by Flaubert. But very soon appears the radical change which forms a tremendous chasm between French and Russian realism. With us, the caricaturist is angry with his man; he scoffs at him, despises him, and attacks his idiot with all the hatred the human mind naturally has for lunacy. Gogol, on the contrary, has a soft corner in his heart for the imbecile he brings before us. He laughs at him as he would at the ingenuousness of a child; with a fund of tenderness. To the former the infirm spirit is but a hateful monster; for the latter it is an unfortunate brother.

The history of the clerk Akaky is neither long nor intricate. Shivering in his rags in the snow, the poor devil's one dream in life is the possession of a military greatcoat. The whole energy of his mind is centred on that one thought. After many privations and great self-denial he realizes his dream, and his great happiness is measured by the strength of his former desire. Life has nothing more to offer him. But that very evening his greatcoat is stolen. The police officials to whom he applies jeer at him. The poor beggar utterly breaks down, takes to his bed, and dies bashfully without troubling anybody, as is proper for such outcasts of the social body.

"And St. Petersburg continues gaily on without Akaky Akakyevich, as if his existence has never even been surmised. The poor, forlorn, unprotected creature cared-for by no one, not even by the naturalist given to examining natural specimens under the microscope, had disappeared and utterly vanished! A passive nature, who had carried the burdens of a public office and left it for a grave without having experienced a single moment worth recording! Before dying, however, it had at least once been touched by the Fairy Wand so desired by all, in the shape of the

greatcoat. But nevertheless misfortune followed as suddenly, as rapidly as it overwhelms even the mighty ones of earth!"

It seems all childish, but let us well consider the essential laws of the dramatic art. What shows off its power is not the grandeur of the subject dealt with, but the eagerness with which the soul desires it. Let us recall to mind miser Harpagon's casket.

In *The Greatcoat*, Gogol takes his revenge for the many years of penal servitude passed in Government offices. It is his first blow at the administrative colossus. His second was *The Inspector*. The theatrical profession always had an attraction for Gogol. It appealed to his satirical side. At this time he composed several comedies not generally appreciated. The only one that was a success was this *Inspector*. The plot is simply that of an inferior music-hall piece. The officials at the headquarters of a Provincial Government are expecting the arrival of an Inspecting Officer, coming incognito, to inspect the several offices. An unknown traveller arrives at the inn. Without a doubt this must be the feared Inspector. The official consciences are disturbed. Tremblingly, one by one approaches him and pleads his case, denouncing his colleagues and at the same time slipping a few propitiatory roubles into his hand. The unknown traveller is at first astounded, but eventually accepts the situation and pockets the money. The fun increases until, like a thunderbolt, the real Inspector arrives on the scene.

The Inspector is not a sentimental comedy, nor is it a study of character. It merely depicts the customs of the day in public life. Among the portraits of this gallery of rascals no one of them can be taken as a type of the lot, but the artist gives each the same distinctive characteristic, to bring out the same special vice. Or, better perhaps, there is only one character kept before our eyes throughout the performance, viz. abstract vice; it is

official Russia, stripped naked, exposing to full view the shameful plague of her venality and despotism.

Gogol has told us of his motives in his *Confessions of an Amateur*, a literary testament made shortly before he died, and which must always be referred to when studying the genesis of this man's work. He writes:

"In *The Inspector* I have tried to concentrate in one piece all that is bad in Russia—as far as I know her—all the vices which exist in those very positions where above all others the utmost rectitude should be deemed imperative. I wished to expose them all at one and the same time. The effect, as is well known, was frightful. The audience, even whilst made to laugh, and I never wrote more wittily, felt all the intensity of my anger. I realized that my laughter had not the same ring it had formerly, and that my work was not that of the man who wrote in former days. The necessity to find merriment in innocent fiction had passed away with my youth."

Yes, that kind of mirth is not appreciated, at least by a stranger, who is disgusted by a vulgarity unredeemed by that lightness of touch and the refined decorum which saves *Tartuffe* from being the foulest of dramas. A close study of the Russian theatres will enable us readily to understand why this kind of art—the Tartuffian dressing of vice—is not so advanced as the other form. In a country sharply divided into two very unequal social categories, poesy and romance have made immense strides because addressed to members of polite society. The theatre, on the other hand, obliged to amuse the people, has like them remained undeveloped and crude. What the masses want is a "Master Pathelin" and buffooneries. Even in the masterpieces, and there are only two—Griboyedoff's *The Evil of being too Clever*, and Gogol's *Inspector*—comedy has become more coarse than refined. The Russian humorist knows of nothing between vulgar farce and coarse venom. We find in him no trace of those

refined, light touches which glance without wounding, so much to our taste. The sparkling jest which brings forth a silent smile is absent. His are the cruel words which stick and are remembered. But Gogol has the lighter touch, though he too can use words with which to castigate all society with one blow. For instance, take the governor's speech to the police subordinate who has thrashed a certain merchant rather too severely. "Be careful, you must 'take' only in accordance with your rank." As a matter of fact the sense of humour in a Russian would be better described as that appertaining to a blackguard. It is also essentially national. By this I mean that it deals more with physical matters and with local eccentricities rather than with the turns of the mind. It is not Molière's sense of humour.

I have often seen *The Inspector* acted. The public boisterously split with laughter at the extravagancies that left us quite indifferent, and which would be quite incomprehensible to any one not knowing the details of Russian life.

On the other hand, the stranger, especially the foreigner, is much impressed with the sadness always underlying Gogol's themes. It did not strike me that this undertone of sadness was taken much to heart by the audience. Moreover, in modern times it would not seem as if the good-natured public were really as incensed against the corruption of officialdom in Russia—now cleansed and sane—as the play would have us believe. The evil is of such ancient date!

The Bishop Luka Jidiata in his *Instructions* dated 1036—the first record in the Russian language—gives his flock the following advice: "Do not take too many tips! . . ." This is not meant sarcastically. I merely mention it to show the existence of the then recognized state of affairs. Any one who has had much to do with oriental races is well aware of the fact that their ideas in such matters

differ greatly from our own, no doubt because their ideas about government are also different. Provided the extortioners are not too exacting or meddlesome, the oriental considers that any kind of service should be remunerated, hence thinks it necessary to pacify a powerful but badly paid servant of the State. On his side the latter looks on the "tip" as quite a matter of course, just as the pleaders and magistrates looked upon the offerings of spices which our forefathers habitually presented to the judge as no great crime either.

If we go to the root of the matter, we can readily discover its origin in the tribute usually paid in olden times, a kind of insurance premium extracted by the stronger for protecting the weaker.

It is only fair to ask those good folks to remember this ethical aspect of the case when their indignation is aroused at the exposure of Russian customs by such performances as *The Inspector* and *Dead Souls.* After all, these good people when standing for election will have no scruples about being generous towards the sovereign public. Do they not realize that the moral aspect is the same, in that they too "corrupt" the master whom they want to serve, just as the Russian does his Prefect and the Turk his Pasha?

What is most remarkable about this piece is that it was allowed to be acted at all. With the well-conceived ideas we have about the Emperor Nicholas it is with difficulty we can imagine that such a satire on his Government could have received the applause it did in 1836. I doubt much if to-day, notwithstanding our greater liberty, such attacks would be allowed. Luckily for Gogol, the Emperor was himself the censor. He read the manuscript placed into his hands by a lady friend. He burst into laughter, and at once commanded his comedians to parody his own officials. On the first day of its appearance he led the applause.

The relations between the autocrat and Gogol are most

instructive, and demonstrate once more the impotence of the "absolute power" against its own consequences. Nicholas liked cleverness, as long as it was inoffensive. Our author tells us of a remarkable anecdote,[1] confirmed in an ode [2] of Pushkin's, who claims to have been an eye-witness. There was a grand ball in the Winter Palace. The Court had been assembled some time. The music had begun. The Emperor's non-arrival became a matter of curiosity. It was surmised that serious state affairs had kept him. At last the monarch appeared, with an absent-minded look on his countenance. Absorbed in the Iliad, he had forgotten the time! No sovereign did more, and with greater delicacy, than Nicholas for the intelligent people who honoured his kingdom with their presence. Their material wants were well provided for, but they tired to death in the exotic atmosphere of their surroundings. Nicholas dealt with his poets like a lover of rare birds who tries to rear them in the exhaust chamber of an air pump.

And so it was with Gogol. I have the particulars from a member of the family who acted as intermediary between him and the Emperor. The fact was mentioned that Gogol was in pecuniary difficulties. "Is he talented?" asked the Tsar. Being satisfied with the answer, he placed 5,000 roubles at her disposal. "But," he added with exquisite grace, "your protégé must not know where the gift comes from, or he may feel himself obliged to write as an official would." Later on Nicholas employed Jukovsky to supply his friend with the needful. Thanks to this Imperial munificence the incorrigible nomad was able to travel abroad and there breathe more freely and more at his ease than in his own country.

The year 1836 was an eventful one for Gogol. At the height of his success his life was poisoned. The sorrows of

[1] *Letters to My Friends.*
[2] "Ode to N——," Complete works, vol. i.

imagination added to his physical suffering, and commenced to embitter his soul. Of the two elements, mirth and melancholy, which ought properly to counterbalance each other, the former diminished and the latter obtained the upper hand. Society in St. Petersburg had applauded *The Inspector*. It could not do otherwise, the Emperor having given the lead. But the forces of malice and spite which such a piece would naturally evoke could not be expected to spare the author. He had at first to submit to a few vexations, even to some direct attacks. But the morose view of life which had already possessed him saw in these matters a systematic persecution. "All are against me," he wrote to a friend, "officials, police, merchants and journalists. All tear my piece to shreds. . . . It has horrified them! I swear to you that nobody can conceive how it makes me suffer. I am weary, body and soul." The first symptoms of a nervous disease made themselves felt. Hypochrondia in a complicated form began to undermine his constitution. Seized with a fit of restlessness, similar to that which brought about the Lübeck episode, he determined to go away again—"to flee," as he said. This time the "flight" took larger dimensions. He only revisited his native land after prolonged intervals—but finally to return there to end his days. He pretended, as also did Turgeneff after him, that he could not get a just and comprehensive view of the country he was writing about except from a distance. After having travelled over all Europe he settled down in Rome. There he made the intimate acquaintance of Ivanoff the painter. This strange but powerful artist, who lived a retired life with the monks of the Monte Soracte, had been for twenty years at work on a painting *The Apparition of Christ*, which was never finished. The two friends mutually supported each other in the fervour of ascetic piety. From now dates the epoch known as that of the Mysticism of Gogol. We shall see later how much truth there is in this phrase. But I

must not anticipate the events of a life which can only be rightly studied through the writings in which it manifests itself. Before shadows darken this spirit let us look at him gathering his forces for his noblest achievement.

The refugee brought the scheme of the book, which was to contain all he had to say, with him when he left Russia. What writer with the least ambition has not dreamt of that book which should contain all he had to say? From the day it is conceived it is always near by to the end. It is the receptacle for one's most intimate thoughts; it becomes the master, if not the tyrant, of one's existence. It chases away other planned schemes as love chases away one's friends. To the weaker minds—and alas, therefore nearly to all—it is but a germ which irritates and distresses the brain where it becomes abortive. The stronger, the chosen even rarely bring it to life. Goethe and his *Faust* have given us the finest example of such a connection, which lasted thirty years. Gogol has given us the saddest. With him it was a veritable obsession, and after a ten years' struggle he succumbed, floored by the spectre he had called up. What was to have been his work, had he been able to finish it, is given us in his *Confession* and in the four volumes of *Letters on Dead Souls*, which is an encyclopædia of contemporary Russia and records the author's matured opinion on all the questions of his day.

Gogol does Pushkin the honour of having chosen the subject. "Pushkin had for a long time advised me to undertake a great composition. One day he spoke to me of my poor health which, he said, might be the cause of an early death. He cited the example of Cervantes, who, though an author of many novels of great merit, would never have attained to the high rank amongst the greatest authors had he not undertaken his *Don Quixote*. Concluding, he gave me a subject of his own conception which he hoped some day to put into verse—one which, he added, he had never before mentioned to a friend, except myself.

The subject was that of *Dead Souls*. The original idea for *The Inspector* also came from him."

Notwithstanding the explicitness of this testimony, equally honouring to both, I am firmly persuaded that the real father of *Dead Souls* is this same Cervantes mentioned by Gogol. On leaving Russia he had gone to Spain. There he had closely studied its literature, and especially *Don Quixote*, which had always been to his liking. The Spanish humorist had given him a subject which was marvellously suited to his own themes, namely, the adventures of a hero driven by a kind of frenzy into all sorts of places and circumstances, which forms the pretext for showing the readers the kaleidoscopic lantern of humanity in a series of pictures.

Everything tends to show that both subjects proceed from the same parent; *e. g.*, their common sardonic and meditative spirit, the sadness underlying a thin veil of mirth, the impossibility of giving them a place among the well-defined classification of kindred works. Gogol objected to the word "novel" being applied to his book. He named it a poem, and divided it into cantos and not into chapters. These ambitious terms have here lost their real sense. Be this as it may, whatever name you may find for *Don Quixote*, the same will hold good for *Dead Souls*.

The "Poem" was to have been in three parts. The first appeared in 1842; the second part incomplete and rudimentary, burnt by the author in a fit of despair, was printed after his death from a copy which had escaped the auto-da-fé.[1] As to the third part, the poet may still be dreaming about it under the block of granite bearing his name in the Moscow Cemetery.

[1] It is to be regretted that in the French translation by M. Chanière, there is nothing to show the above divisions so necessary for the proper understanding of the *Dead Souls*. I think the student ought to be told that the first part—the only one which has received the author's authority

IV

We are shown a man named Chichikoff, in a brichka, drawn by three lean horses, guided by a coachman, Seliphon, driving along the mournful provincial roads all over Russia "into the eternal distance, made gloomy by the perpetual blue pine forests." Where is he driving to, this restless person? Everywhere! He is going to the great lord of the manor and the small landed proprietor, to the chief of police and the village attorney, into the Governor's ball-room and the peasant's hut. What is he looking for, this Chichikoff?

An idea has come to him, the simple idea of genius—the idea of a brilliant financial venture not foreseen by the penal code. If Gogol had possessed many such he would have been quite wrong in spending his life in writing, for he could have become a substantial hero of the Stock Exchange and all the rest of it.

Everybody knows that every Russian peasant—every "soul" as he was called in the language then current—had a personal value and was a recognized movable property, and as such he was as negotiable as any other.

A possessor of a thousand souls could sell or exchange them, could pawn them at the bank, could raise money on them—on the security of a "soul." On the other hand, they were a source of revenue, and their owners had to pay a poll tax for every adult male and female. The assessments were made at long intervals, during which periods the returns were never revised because of the assumption that the natural increases of the population more than compensated for the losses by death. If an epidemic

for publication—ends with Canto XI at p. 47. M. Chanière has completed the second part with an imaginary epilogue written by a Kieff professor. All Russian editions omit such insertions. On the other hand, they give two of Gogol's editions, with many variants; which gives one some idea of the intense labours of the writer.

depopulated a village, the landlord became a heavy loser, for he was obliged to continue paying the tax for hands which no longer worked for him.

Chichikoff, a clever and ambitious rogue, said to himself: "I will go into every out-of-the-way corner of Russia. I will ask the good people to sell me the 'souls' on their books that have died since last assessment. They will be only too glad to hand me over a fictitious property and be relieved of a real tax. I will then register my purchases with due formality. No tribunal would dream of my asking them to legalize the sale of dead people. When I have thus acquired several thousands of serfs I will take my bond to a bank in Petersburg or Moscow, I will raise all I can on them, and there I am, rich, able to buy me peasants of flesh and bone."

The advantages to an author of this idea are obvious. Every home in every grade of society is opened out for our inspection. It furnishes a touchstone with which at first hand to test the intelligence and character of all. The adventurer approaches a man and makes him the strange request to sell him his "dead souls," without, of course, explaining his secret intentions. After the first moment of astonishment the man more or less understands what is required of him, and acts according to his natural instinct. The simple gratefully give this benefactor their "dead souls" for nothing. The suspicious are at once on their guard; they discuss the matter and try to fathom its quaintness and to gain something by it. The avaricious take the chances by demanding an exorbitant price, but Chichikoff found them greater rogues still, and is eventually himself stuck. The only thing that did not occur was an indignant refusal, nor was he once denounced. The financier had quite satisfied himself beforehand as to his countrymen's scruples. The plot was particularly acceptable to Gogol as it afforded an unending source for the serio-comic situations so dear to him. This clever

writer never dwells too heavily on the lugubrious foundations that underlie his pleasantry. He seems to ignore it. Its horrors sally forth by themselves from out of the ghastly depths of the story. I do not know if even the author and his first readers themselves fully recognized the force of these contrasts. Their sensibilities had been blunted by their many years of bondage; and all the transactions in which they take part seemed quite natural.

As time passes the effect of this book in Russia will increase. This horrible bartering of "dead souls," suggesting a continuance of slavery even after death, becomes more vivid. The idea of this comic "dance of death" reminds one often of that given by Regnard in his *Légataire*. In the second part he gives us an identical scene, where a female dressed up to resemble a rich woman who had just died is made to sign a false will. Observe this arrangement of ideas in the long discussion with Dame Korobochka, where she asks, "How am I to sell you the dead? Are you going to take them out of their graves?"—"By no means. You will keep their ashes. I only want their names." Observe again Chichikoff's address to his new subjects locked up in his cash-box! We shall come back later to this capital piece.

I cannot dream of passing in review before you the innumerable types created by Gogol. They form a large crowd coming from all points of the horizon, and yet every individual, by his special characteristics and his originality is graven on our memory. One bit of caricature enhances the whole outline, always real and brilliant. Russia appears in this book like a people described in one of Callot's works. From among the first few pages we cull the following examples of what are intended to be the ordinary types to be met with outside the great towns. There is Sobakevich, the universal scandal-monger, always snarling and evil-speaking; Nozdreff, the noisy roisterer and boaster, always on the drink, at all times willing to tempt

fortune " at the gaming table, which is every Russian's consolation." There's Dame Korobochka, opinionated and selfish—refusing to accept the natural meaning of what is put before her, and always bringing everything round to her own fixed ideas—who sells her bacon and her honey, otherwise a good woman and strict in her observance of the rules of hospitality. She does not forget to ask her guest if he is in the habit of having his feet tickled to send him to sleep. Her late husband could never do without it. Then again there is Maniloff, an excellent study of a simpleton, frequently described by Gogol, who loved to work in drab with unpronounced natures, amusing only by their silly nonsense. We must not forget the jolly Peter Petush, that happy individual who so funnily replies to those who find him dull: " You eat too little, that is all that is the matter with you. Just try and have a good dinner. Dulness is but a new idea. In former times no one found it dull."

But the most remarkable of all these types—the one most carefully worked out—is that of the hero of the piece. Chichikoff is not, as one might be led to believe, a first cousin to Robert Macaire, a commonplace thief. The poor devil was merely born under an unlucky star, as the Russian has it: " From birth his outlook on life was through a frosted window." A dismissed official, he exploits his ideas, without any sense of the immorality of his doings. In any case he hurts nobody, and hopes to die an honourable man. Perfectly exact and correct in all his dealings, he has no thought or energy for anything beyond his own " dead souls." There is nothing pronounced in his outward appearance. All is commonplace and undefined. He is described as " a gentleman, neither handsome nor ugly, not too fat and not too thin. It was impossible to say he was old, but he certainly was no longer young. . . ." And so forth. Gogol intends to make it a comprehensive type, so as to make it adaptable to a large number of

individuals under varying circumstances, and we appreciate the author's cleverness. Chichikoff must also have as few personal characteristics as possible, for it is not this or that man who is meant to be brought before us, but Russia, the irresponsible, the debased.

Like the leading hero, the shady people who figure around him are not at bottom entirely bad. They are necessary creations, and therefore permissible. They are the outcome of history, of public customs, of Government, and of all that is detrimental to Russia. The Russian himself is an excellent creature, only corrupted by the social conditions in which he is placed !

That is the keynote to the theme worked out in *Dead Souls* and in *The Inspector*, to be struck again by Turgeneff in his *Tales of a Hunter*.

You will at once notice Rousseau's fundamental sophistry which has poisoned the minds of all the moralists of this age all over Europe.

At the end of the first part of the book, where Chichikoff's antecedents are discussed, the author takes up his defence in an able manner, partly ironic, partly serious, thus :—

" That he was not a hero possessing all the perfections and virtues is evident. What was he, then ? A villain ? Why a villain ? Why this severity in judging others ? To-day, there are no villains amongst us. There are only amiable and well-intentioned men. . . . The reader who meets Chichikoff daily as a friend, who fraternizes with him and finds him agreeable to deal with, this same reader will now look askance at him, when met with in a drama or in a poem. The wise man is not offended by any kind of character. He penetrates beneath the surface, and dissects him down to his basic elements. . . . The passions of men are as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea shore—not one resembling the other. Whether noble or base, they all begin by obeying man, and end by getting a terrible mastery over him. . . . They are born within him,

from the very moment of his first appearance in the world, and he is powerless to resist them. Whether for good or evil they will each fulfil their destiny. . . . "

After concluding this essay anent psychological positivism, the writer proceeds adroitly to discuss the designs of Providence who has ordained everything for the best and will eventually manage to bring things into proper order once more. I am only indicating the trend of his ideas. One would have to quote the entire passage to make Gogol's views on this matter thoroughly understood.[1]

What I particularly want to bring out in this book is the wealth of this contemporaneous literature. It is like an ocean containing all the germs for the (literary) things to come. As regards " form and substance," Gogol has done everything for his successors.

By " form " I mean the realism shown instinctively in his preceding works and consciously and systematically in *Dead Souls.*

As an epigraph for contemporaneous literature, the following clever observation of the author might be quoted as applicable: " The little things which only appear small when told in a book are found to be most important in real life." And Gogol is fully conscious of the new direction he has given to the art of writing. He formulates rules of rhetoric in twenty places, at first cautiously, and then with all necessary boldness. Thus—

" The author apologizes for taking up so much of the reader's time with people of small means, knowing from experience what repugnance he has for the lower classes." —(*Canto I.*)

" Ingratitude is the scribe's lot who dares to record all that passes under his eyes at every moment—all that which the unobservant eye does not see; the hideous

[1] I am astonished to find that the French translator should have excised this passage. Translators often have a singular way of mutilating their authors.

and disgusting slime of misery with which our lives are hampered; all the lower side of those indifferent, commonplace, bruised natures which encumber and annoy our way in life. . . . He will not be applauded by the public. The critics of his day will deem his creations useless and base; he will be allotted a contemptible place among the libellous writers of humanity; he will be denied everything—soul, heart and talent. For the contemporary critic will not admit that the vitrified substance which enables him to see the light (out of his window) and that which enables him to study the movements of invisible insects (under the microscope) are equally marvellous. He does not admit that it requires a profound depth of soul to illustrate a scene taken from the shady side of life, and to turn it into a masterpiece."—(*Canto VII.*)

I extract two passages from *Letters on Dead Souls*, which seem to bear on the point.

"Those who have dissected my faculties as a writer have not been capable of discerning the essential characteristic of my nature. Only Pushkin has been able to do so. He always contended that no author but myself had such a gift for bringing out the trivialities of life, or describing so well the platitudes of the mediocre man, or to open all eyes to the infinitely small things of life which ordinarily escape observation. That, I maintain, is my highest faculty. The reader is disgusted at the baseness of all my heroes. On closing my book he appears to be coming out of the asphyxiating atmosphere of a cave into the light of day! I should have been forgiven if I had shown them refined and picturesque scoundrels. But their sordidness was unpardonable. The Russian is frightened at being shown his worthlessness."—(*Letter III.*)

"My friend, if you will render me the greatest possible service to be expected from a Christian, collect all those treasures for me (*i. e.* the small things of daily life) whenever you may find them. It would not cost you much

to make a note of them every evening, in the form of a diary of this kind. 'Heard to-day this or that opinion. Spoke to so-and-so. His status is. . . . Has the character . . . correct, presentable, or otherwise. He holds his hands thus. . . . He snuffs his tobacco in this way. . . .' In fact, everything your eyes observe—small or great!" —(*Postscript to Letters*).

This shows that the "human document" was invented in Russia a long time ago.

As with the "form," so Gogol also leaves as a "substance" an unlimited source available to all his inheritors from which to draw. The greater part of the types presented to us in the Russian novel have their beginning in the *Dead Souls*. In the Canto VII, for instance, we find that landed proprietor, Tentetnikoff. His life is given us in all its phases—at school, at college, and in Government employ. Tired of "administering on paper provinces hundreds of miles in extent and on which he has never set foot," he returns to his own estates, full of great schemes and love for his peasants, eager to introduce agricultural and other reforms. This idyll soon vanishes. Misunderstandings quickly arise between serf and landlord, leading to disagreements. Tentetnikoff, disgusted, abandons his good intentions, throws up every scheme already begun, withdraws within himself and enters the final state of torpor. Every similar energetic effort in Russia ends in a desire to share Candide's ideal, but often the strength and means to cultivate a garden have passed away. We come across such a man everywhere. He is the Lavretsky of Turgeneff; the Bezuchoff and the Levine of Tolstoy. He re-appears in many forms, under many different conditions, but always carrying the same half-dozen master-strokes of description assigned to him by Gogol. It is the same with many others; the official, the retired army officer, and the domestic servant. As to the peasant, there will be little left to add in the future

to what has already been written about him by this author, who knew him well—none better.

A fund of characters and a fund of ideas! The great currents of thought that are to fertilize the Russian mind will ever flow from this first source. I shall here only consider this one, for it is the one which has given the Slav literature its chief characteristic and high moral value.

Many passages in *Dead Souls*—though often veiled by sarcasm—contain as many sentiments of brotherly love, of pity for the poor and of sympathy for the suffering as are to be found in all the authors writing in the vein of a Dostoyevsky. It is not the same with Gogol as with the poets who preceded him—merely a vague instinct of the race which is about to blossom forth. He has carefully examined the national virtues, and after a strict analysis praises them with the full knowledge thus obtained. It is impossible to describe and differentiate them better than he does in one of the "Letters." The author of the *House of the Dead* could not have done better.

"Compassion for the fallen is a marked Russian characteristic. Recall to mind the touching spectacles afforded by our people when witnessing the convicts pass on their way to Siberia. Every one brings something, either food or money or a Christian word of sympathy. There is no ill-feeling against the criminal, none of that romantic infatuation which turns him into a hero. He is not asked for his autograph or for his portrait. He is not approached out of mere curiosity, as is the case in civilized Europe. Here we find something more. It is not a desire to excuse him and to screen him from the ends of justice; it is a desire to comfort his anguished soul, to console him as one would a brother, as we are commanded by Christ to console one another."—(*Letter X.*)

And are not these beautiful thoughts similar to Dostoyevsky's?

"One hears already the sighs of the human race, steeped

in sorrow and mental anguish. Evil overtakes all the peoples of Europe. They are in despair, these wretches, not knowing whence to obtain help. All their efforts, all the remedies they have invented, are of no avail. This misery will increase until the day when the hardest heart will be utterly broken; until a new force will arise, a new Power of Righteousness hitherto unknown. Man will then be filled with a burning love such as the world has never seen."—(*Idem.*)

In *Dead Souls* these sentiments are more restrained and always disguised, and hence more effective. I am afraid of wearying my reader were I to multiply the illustrations, but I shall limit myself to one more, which to my mind is the most convincing, and is the culminating point of the whole work. Everything is centred in it. Fascinating fantasy, spirit of devilry, growls of passion, are written in a language which Michelet might have envied. The movement is startling and unexpected. Popular, eloquent, turn and turn about; explicit and concise, or as suggestive as a dream. I am not much of a judge, but I know nothing in the Russian language to equal it. I should much have liked to give the entire passages. It is impossible to translate the words, every one of which awakes a vision of customs far remote, or of the sufferings of the slave. Thanks to God, we know nought of the latter.

Chichikoff has returned to his inn after a successful deal. He rubs his hands with glee as he eyes his precious cash-box, and then proceeds to make out a list of the number of his " Dead Souls."

" A strange and indescribable feeling came over him as he once more looked over these bits of paper, equivalent to peasants, who at one time were veritable peasants who worked, laboured, tilled, drank, and robbed their masters, unless, indeed, they happened to be really honest fellows. Each of these labels seemed to have a peculiar

character of its own, as if betraying the personality of the individual it represented. Some had writing attached to them; one was marked 'Good carpenter'; another 'Intelligent, teetotaller'; a third had on it 'Father unknown. Mother in my service. Well behaved. Trustworthy.' All these details gave these papers a kind of life-like interest. These people might have been alive yesterday.

"Chichikoff pondered long over each name. He was touched, and with a deep sigh he said: 'What a large number! Tell me, my friends, all you have done in life, and all you went through.'

"And the rogue, now in a good humour, amuses himself by reconstructing the lives of these men with unknown or uncouth names on the list before him. The different trades are noted, scenes passing in rapid succession, touching events where the gentle spirit of the peasant reveals itself in one word. Out of this casket, from among these papers, we see arising the phantom of the Russian giant, alive once more and taking shape in the bodies of this cattle in which he traffics. He addresses these poor serfs in the rough and caressing words he habitually applies to young animals. But in those familiar tones one can appreciate the tenderness of the author. Possibly it may occur to him that thirty years before these souls, now past and gone, were the heroes of 1812; the 'slaves' who, in a manner unprecedented in history and without hope or expectation, liberated their invaded country, and with their life's blood drenched the soil to which they were irretrievably chained.

"Chichikoff continues making his inventory. He comes across lists of fugitives, who are accounted as dead, for they have lost their value. But where are they at this moment? The poet's imagination follows them in their supposed wanderings, tramping through the forests or along the great Siberian rivers. 'Abakum Tiroff! What

art doing, brother? Where art loafing? Has the wind blown thee to the banks of the Volga? Hast tasted of freedom among the bargees?' Here, Chichikoff stops to think. Of what? Of Abakum Tiroff's fate? Or is he thinking of himself, as all Russians do, whatever their age, their rank or their fortune, when once they begin to dream of a life of chance adventure with all its maddening risks?"

And then Gogol enters into the details of such a life. He describes the fun, the dances, the furious quarrels of the "burlakis," that crowd of outlaws and escaped convicts who haul the barges on the Volga. The picture culminates in a vision representing all the miseries, the aspirations of the people whose subdued and stifled murmurings we have just been told of. The preceding pages are summed up in the following superb sentence, impossible to render adequately, which seems to float far away on the songs of pain of their adventures.

"It is there you suffer, then, my 'burlakis,' always in the bonds of brotherhood! As lately together amidst fun and frolic, so now in toil and sweat, dragging at your rope, singing your monotonous song—and like thee, O Russia—without end!"

His realistic descriptions are frequently intermingled with similar brilliant bursts of fancy bordering on delirium. His comparison of Russia to a Troika being driven madly into space, intoxicated with the sensation of rapid movement and its momentum, is recognized as one of his best efforts. These satirists are ever inspired by a furious whirlwind of patriotism, on which account a great deal might be forgiven them.

But there was too much to be forgiven. When the first part of *Dead Souls* appeared in 1842 some were stupefied, others raised cries of indignation. So *that* was our native country! A den of rogues, idiots and outcasts, without one redeeming point. Pushkin had already warned his

friend in a famous sentence: "I recited to him the first chapters of my book. He laughed, as he always did when he read anything of mine. But I saw him becoming anxious, and by degrees his face wore a serious look. When I had finished, he exclaimed in a dejected tone of voice: 'Oh God! Ours is indeed a sad country!'" Everybody repeated the poet's words. Many refused to recognize themselves in this gloomy picture. They accused the writer of having seen them through spectacles coloured by his own infirmities, of being a scurillous slanderer and a renegade. Many protested, and with reason, that notwithstanding all the evils of serfdom and all the well-known administrative corruption, there were yet many brave and gallant hearts in Nicholas' Empire.

The unfortunate Gogol realized that he had hit too hard. From that moment he inundates the Press with explanations. He adjures his readers to suspend their judgment until they have read the second part—in which is the light to contrast with the gloom of the first.

But this sweet consolation was a long time in coming. The gentle visions refused to be created by the pen of the grieved satirist. This is seen clearly enough in the fragments at our disposal. What a striking difference between the black and vigorous creations in the first volume and the flat, faded figures balanced against them in the second! In the Prince-Governor the "enemy of fraud," who annihilates the culpable officials and brings back a reign of justice into his town, the author has but reproduced the morals of ancient story-books. So it is, also, with Murasoff, the rich and pious man of business. He is but the M. Madeleine of *Les Miserables*, but devoid of the epic spirit. He is a rich, religious layman who preaches, pardons, influences and arranges everything. The lives of both these "righteous ones" are more like the lives of the canonized dead of whom frescoes are to be seen in the ancient monasteries in Moscow. Julia, who ought to

have revenged the Russian woman who up to that time had been badly treated, merely throws her shadow across the scene. Only just conceived, she steps out of Gogol's hands. He was never able to create an attractive woman. That is his greatest blot. Nevertheless, this work, even incomplete, took hold of the imagination. It has never ceased to be looked upon as a true personification of ancient Russia. For the last forty years it is the mainspring of national life. Every joke has passed into a proverb; every character has a permanent place in the ideal society to be found in the standard literature of every country. The stranger who has not read *Dead Souls* often comes to a standstill in conversation, out of ignorance of the ancestral and family traditions to which references are made at every turn. Chichikoff, the coachman Seliphon, and their three crocks, are as handy to the Russian as are Don Quixote, Sancho and Rosinante to a Spaniard.

They are especially to be met with in the older provinces, where Gogol lost them before finishing their story. For Chichikoff is not dead, and the fraudulent and the intriguer are ever expecting a call from him. Often when taking my long journeys over the mist-laden steppe, and meeting the solitary brichka of an officer or merchant, I caught myself peering into the heap of rugs and furs, expecting to see him! And in the shrill peals of harness-bells that laugh or cry—one never knows which with Russian bells—I seemed to hear the echo of his mysterious laughter drowning the noises of autumn's rain and the shiverings of the aspen.

V

Gogol returned from Rome about 1846. His health rapidly gave way, and all kind of work was made difficult

for him by frequent attacks of fever. Disheartened, he set to work again on *Dead Souls*. His pen, out of harmony with his nerves, played him false. In one of the critical moments of his illness he burnt all his books and the MSS. of the second part of his poem. Matters of faith now absorbed him entirely. He had a strong desire to visit the Holy Land. To enable him to obtain the necessary funds, he wrote and published—so he declares in the preface, in which he also solicits the prayers of his readers —the last of his *Letters to My Friends*. These are epistles on spiritual matters, mixed up with explanations as to his past writings, already referred to. Not one of his most satirical works did him so much injury or made him so many enemies as this treatise on religion.

It would be very difficult for me to let my readers understand all the commotion and the long literary warfare that it caused, and which lasts to this day. To succeed, it would be necessary to give a full account of the ideas prevailing in the second half of the Emperor Nicholas' reign, a period which is still so little known. Later on we shall come across some indications regarding this extraordinary movement which had carried away the greater part of Russia's youth. We shall see how far it was from being guided by the doctrines extolled by Gogol.

The writer's point of departure was the same as that taken up by Chayadayeff in his *Philosophical Letter*, viz. the absolute necessity of living a spiritual life. But he inverted the thesis. The *Philosophical Letter* had been acceptable because of an attack on the Government and the Established Church. The *Letters to My Friends* praised this same Government and the Established Church. It repudiated the efficacy of all the regenerating virtues current in the West, and at the very time when the Russian mind was being drenched with them. To appreciate the full force of the astonishment and irritation with which Gogol's professions of faith were received one

has to refer to the excellent labours of Shebalsky[1] dealing with Russian literature of this period. They suffice to establish the fact that at the time this troublesome person (Gogol) lifted up his voice the religious question did not exist. For the cultivated classes, the Church was a Government institution, as inviolable as any other, but whose existence was at all times ignored except when the officially prescribed rites had to be performed as a matter of propriety. These ceremonies duly performed, Atheism resumed its right and underwent the same mutations as with us in the eighteenth century. It was handled doctrinally and insidiously by the philosophers, and received with deference and discretion by polite society. It would have been considered in the worst taste for an ecclesiastic to have stepped out from his ordinary routine functions into the battlefield of intellectual polemics, and to intrude with a religious thought.

The scandal may be imagined. Here was a layman who wrote a book which, with the authority of a Doctor of Divinity, violently rebuked the people for their religious indifference, reminding them that the teachings of the New Testament should penetrate their whole life, personal and social. In the essay on the clergy it took the attitude of defending a body universally despised. In the chapter on politics it formulated a catechism in the interests of the Slav, and extolled the necessary autocracy of the Tsar as being a Power of Love, able to soften the harshness of the law, and alone capable of remedying the great sufferings of the people, sufferings which the ideas and teachings of Western philanthropists had failed to alleviate. The lay preacher spoke much about this suffering people, just like Herzen and Belinsky, but instead of advising an insistence on their rights or of making the prevailing sufferings a reason for forcible opposition, he appealed to the intelligent classes to exercise their duty of being an

[1] *The Russian Prophecies*, Nov., Dec., 1884; Feb., 1885.

example and a help to the peasants. He gave abundant advice to all classes in the State, he declared that he himself would never write again, as he was fully occupied with saving his own soul and in helping others to do likewise. He also hinted at the necessity of studying his former works, and added his reasons at length for having written them at all.

This production touches on almost every subject It is as full of philosophic trash, as nebulous as any in the enemy's camp. It contains ancient truths, always worth repeating because always forgotten. It has a few new ideas, which are acceptable as life-giving to the Slavs this day, and, as usual, this was precisely the reason why he was accused of being a reactionary. The Press—represented at that time only by magazines, weeklies, and reviews (so called) —forsook the man who was imprudent enough to try to swim against the stream. It made much of this opportunity. Here was a man who only the day before was the recognized leader of the opposition, who till lately was the recognized author for the promotion of mirth and folly, the defamer and satirist of Russian official life, now turned preacher with the adopted tone of one of the fathers of the Church ! Gogol had one vulnerable spot, for he actually claimed the leadership of the conscience, in the name of that intellectual supremacy which had been universally accorded him. These last letters of his indeed present a strange admixture, common enough, of Christian humility and literary swollen-headedness.

It was decreed that he had plunged into the unknown depths of mysticism, and they buried him there accordingly. Gogol's mysticism was considered a genuine fact. This opinion is so firmly established that I am afraid I shall astonish the Russians in asking them to reconsider it. I have again carefully read his *Letters*, and have recalled to mind the views of those who were always by his side, and if the words of our language have any meaning, I distinctly

affirm that Gogol was not a mystic. I would much like to translate and quote his ideas on charity and on sickness. They could be accused of being tainted with Jansenism, worthy of having been from the pen of an Arnauld or a Saci. His theories on politics and Socialism are repugnant to our French ideas; but though this is beside the question, perhaps it is to be noted that Aksakoff and all the leaders of the Slavonic school are to-day proclaiming the same views, with even greater force, and yet nobody in Russia accuses them of mysticism. The fact of having given up literature to devote oneself to one's own salvation has in every age seemed quite natural and reasonable. Hence, too, I have never been able to see Racine's qualifications for being called a mystic. As to Pascal, his name is no longer connected with that calling outside M. Homais' (literary) "pharmacy." Tolstoy, who acted similarly to Gogol, has entered his strong protest at being labelled a mystic, notwithstanding that he has himself given us a new, obscure theology of his own. His predecessor humbly adhered to the established dogmas. But perhaps the words themselves have but a relative meaning. What was mysticism in 1840 was not so styled two centuries before, nor half a century later.

But a truce to these mystic wrangles. It will be more interesting to learn what became of this poor author in the midst of the storm which he had raised. He went to Jerusalem, and travelled some time among the sad ruins in Palestine—always a tempting and dangerous country for souls in distress. Returned to Moscow, he was welcomed back in the homes of his friends. But the Cossack could not succeed in remaining quiet. He possessed nothing, having given all to the poor. Since 1844 he had given up all that accrued from the sale of his works to a fund for necessitous students.

His hosts saw him arrive with a small hand-bag, stuffed with papers, cuttings from newspapers, pamphlets and

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criticisms directed against himself. This glorious and bitter collection was all his baggage, indeed, all he possessed in the world. The picture presented by Gogol at that time was given me by a young person who grew up in one of the houses frequented by him. He was small in stature; his legs too short in proportion to his body, with a crooked walk; shy, and badly set. A mass of hair like a horse's mane well down over his forehead, and his long, prominent nose, made him look rather ridiculous. He spoke very little, and with difficulty. Now and then he recovered some of his former brightness, especially when with children, who were always dear to him; but he soon relapsed into his habitual gloom.

This description is corroborated by Turgeneff in his notes, made after his first visit to the author of *Dead Souls:* "A roguish look still in those small brown and tired-looking eyes. The face of a fox. In all points the appearance of a village school-master." [1]

Gogol always had this unpleasing exterior and clumsy manner, with the consequent shyness. And this may perhaps explain the fact that no biographer makes a single reference to an affair of the heart; one can therefore understand the absence of "the woman" in all his writings.

There is a legend, as universally accepted as that of his being a mystic, that Gogol died from the effects of hallucinations, exhausted by mortifications of the flesh and excessive fastings. I am assured, however, on the best authority, that he succumbed to typhoid fever, which supervened one of his normal attacks. The actual nature of his chronic illness was as imperfectly known as was the state of his mind during his last days. One had ceased to look into that powerful brain, long since devoid of images and joys. At the age when others commence their work he had finished his. The frantic

[1] Turgeneff, *Complete Works*, vol. i, p. 64. Moscow edition.

energy of the Russian had eaten him up. This was the fate of nearly all the writers of this period. Whether by bullet or sword, mental disorder or consumption, when it was not a tragic accident it was an inexplicable lassitude that brought them to naught, when near their fortieth year.

This precocious and prodigal Russia treats her children as she does her plants; creates them, brings them early to bud, fails to make them blossom, and cuts them down when still full of sap. Of these, as of all her sons and their ideas, may be said what a philosopher once wrote to a poor woman of genius: "You are doomed for sacrifice, because there is no equilibrium between your spirit and your actions."

Gogol's productive faculties were already ruined at thirty, after the publication of *Dead Souls*. On February 21, 1852, at forty, his flame was extinguished. The incident made very little stir. Imperial favour had forgotten the writer, and since 1848 he was everywhere in disgrace. The Governor of Moscow was censured for having renewed the faded ribbons of his decorations and for following him to the grave. Turgeneff was punished by being "exiled" to his own estates for having written a letter in which he had spoken of the deceased as a "Great Man."

Posterity has resolved to endorse this title. But what is the exact place to be assigned to Gogol in the literary Pantheon? Mérimée finds it as being "among the best English humorists." That seems to me too modest, unless the critic had Swift in his mind, in which case the suggestion was honourable and just. Personally, I would place the Russian author half way between Cervantes and Le Sage, both masters of the realistic. But it would be premature. Would the good things of Spain as contained in *Don Quixote* taste so well if they had not simmered in our literature for three hundred years? From childhood on, the mere mention of an Alcade brings a happy smile

to our lips. Gogol shows us too modern a world. I frankly tell the French reader that he will be disgusted with those books. They are really painful to read, what with decency and morality openly ignored, an army of disconnected characters with unpronounceable names, all the more strange because they are intended to convey some special meaning difficult at first to catch. Nobody need think that he will find in Gogol's books any of the charms to be found in those of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. These show us finished results, not the beginnings; the fruit, not the roots. They appeal to us principally because they are human, and dealing with current European events. The evils from which they suffer have crossed the borders of their country, and the spiritual and intellectual questions they study are such as have spread all over the West. In some things they are on a level with us; in others they have gone farther. Unless seen through the lens of the historian, Gogol is much more distant and behind the times, for both his foundations and his accessories are too exclusively Russian. To make his writings acceptable to "men of letters," their translations would have to be of the best. As yet, unfortunately, they are wanting.

Let us, then, leave him in Russia! There Gogol is the acknowledged father and master by all the great men since his day, for they owe him their language. Though more subtle and more harmonious as written by Turgeneff, it is more forcible and has a far greater variety when used by the master of prose who first fashioned it.

As to the themes, I have said enough to do him justice. He lived at a moment when his native country, uncertain of her future, did not know herself and was travailing in the dark. This brutal surgeon came to deliver her. He pointed out what she ought to discard—even though loving it—and what she ought to hate. This realist, in the highest sense of that term, supplied the tool suitable to the mind and art of our own times, and clearly pointed out its use

for the future. He even foresaw the recent fulfilment, in Russia at least, of this kind of minute examination of human phenomena, and of man himself, as inaugurated by him. If there is any doubt, let us recall the sentence—one of the last from his pen—to be found in his *Confessions of an Author:* "I have followed life in its realities, not in dreams of the imagination, and I have thus been able to find Him who is the Giver of Life."

CHAPTER IV

"THE 'FORTIES"—TURGENEFF

WHILST Gogol, forsaken, was quietly ending his days in silence and destitution, during the years from 1843 to the days of the Crimean War, his influence was rapidly spreading in Russia, nourishing the mind, and breeding a legion of novelists. I do not think history contains another instance of such a spontaneous and vigorous growth. All the writers who have made a name for themselves during the last forty years sprang up at the same time and departed under the same flag—that of the Realistic School. Notwithstanding the divergence of ideas and the idiosyncrasies of each individual, these authors are all obedient to a common law and remain loyal to the plan laid down by Gogol and Belinsky. Whatever the subsequent development, they always have a family likeness and bear a certain indelible stamp—they are the men of the 'Forties.[1]

They freely breathed in its magnificent illusions, and have subsequently suffered from the compression of those years; their hearts have remained dilated and sore.

The poets of 1820 found their inspiration in the sensations of the individual; those of 1840 in the sentiments of humanity—in what might be called "human compassion."

Before studying the writers of the first rank separately,

[1] I must be allowed this idiom, for it is the Russian expression, accepted in the French language, current in St. Petersburg and Moscow. It obviates a paraphrase. It is continually used as a brief way of referring to the generation, of that decade to which modern Russia attributes her literary origin.

which this epoch has bequeathed us, it is advisable to note the conditions they had in common at the time of their evolution.

Let us take a general purview of this interesting movement at the time of its preparation. There are also a few lesser lights among their companions, who, less talented, less favoured by fortune, it would be but just to mention by name, and I shall return to them in the course of our studies.

I

Russia did not escape the universal ferment which began in 1848, and Europe never realized the feeble echoes that answered the piercing cries of her own social distress.

Life in that great silent country is like that of her frozen rivers—out of sight and hearing. They, too, seemingly stand still for six months in the year. But under that solid ice, the water flows along, creatures move and breed, the phenomena of nature continue unceasingly. So it is with the nation. To those who only look at the surface—and who in Russia at this time saw further ?—she was inert and dumb under the hand of Nicholas. Not a wrinkle to be seen in the uniform ! Notwithstanding, ideas from the West found their way across that great barrier. Books passed through as contraband, flew from hand to hand, in the schools, the literary clubs, even in the army.

The Russian universities were at that time but sickly wet-nurses ; they gave the taste for science but could not nourish. The best students left them disheartened and went to Germany, there to find more substantial food. It was the fashion, based on a commonly held conviction, that for the perfecting of the light Slav brain it was necessary to pour into it a little German lead. The Minister of Education himself sent his own candidates to Berlin or Göttingen. These young men, when properly loaded with moral philo-

sophy and the leaven of Liberalism—equipped with ideas for which there was no use in their own country—return to Russia discontented and rebellious. The Minister was eternally bewailing the astonishing sight of a hen hatching ducklings. These suspicious emissaries of the West were recommended to the care of the police—whilst others continued to be sent to the same school. The young Russian "Bursch" bringing home to his brethren the sour grapes of the Promised Land is a common type in this literature.

Pushkin, with his usual gentle irony, already referred to this in his sketch of one Lensky in his *Onegin*. "A certain Vladimir Lensky—whose soul was made in Göttingen—a fine fellow in the prime of life—poet and follower of Kant—from nebulous Germany. He brought back the fruit of knowledge—wondrous dreams—a burning spirit, rather quaint—violent eloquence—black hair, curling down on his shoulders."

Turgeneff later gives us portraits of the finished article, which he acquired during his stay in Berlin, where Bakunin had been a fellow student.

On their return, these students organized clubs, where the foreign dogmas were discussed in impassioned whispers, and where the laggards who had stayed at home were duly initiated. Those who thought themselves clever professed transcendental philosophy borrowed from a Hegel or a Feuerbach made in Germany, or a Saint-Simon, a Fourier, or a Prudhon of France. The more learned read Stein and Haxthausen. One of them wrote: "I would rather give up my boots than one of my apostles."

It must be clearly understood, however, that these metaphysics were merely a cloak to something far more important and pressing.

The two great intellectual schools into which modern Russia was divided in 1886, and which took the place of the two main political divisions of other countries, were

formed at this time. One, the Slavonic School, was led by Kiryevsky, Hamekoff, and the two Arsakoffs. It upheld the views of Karamsin and protested against the blasphemous and unpatriotic doctrines of Chayadayeff. According to them there was no recognition of anything outside Holy Russia, which was the sole depositary of the true Christian spirit, and was specially set apart for conversion of the world. In opposition to those self-ordained Levites was the Gentile camp, an imposing school imbued with Liberal and Western ideas, seething with reforms, and soon to be considered revolutionary.

I shall not trouble the French readers with their divisions and sub-divisions, among which they would scarcely be able to find their way ; all the more, as they change every moment with the mercurial ideas of these new discoverers of the world.

As a matter of fact they deal with affairs quite different to what they seem to do if taken literally. In the biographies of the men of these times controversialists were constantly spoken of as belonging to either the " Hegelian right " or the " Hegelian left." This is the accepted terminology which we would find simpler to name " Liberalism or " Radicalism." But as all political discussions are forbidden in Russia they had necessarily to be disguised under a cloak of philosophical, and as it were in a hieroglyphic, language. The disputants never had anything else in mind but politics, and when commenting on a page of Feuerbach or a verse of *Faust*, they had a thousand ways of so expressing it as to successfully escape the censor. Such Eastern subtleties did not help towards making matters, in themselves difficult enough, any clearer; for, when judging the Russian polemics of those days, and even at all times, we seem to have before us one of those theatrical scenes where indistinct forms dance behind a threefold veil to simulate the clouds screening the goddesses.

The " Liberals " of 1848 carried on the traditions of the

Decembrists of 1825 in the same way as the Jacobites carried on the traditions of the Girondists. Nothing can give us a better idea of the march of events at this time than to compare the ideals of these two revolutionary movements. The Decembrists were the aristocrats who dreamed of a refined revolution, which occupied itself solely with the matters then fashionable in Paris and London—such as charters, parliaments, and liberty of speech. They consisted partly of Colonels in the Guards who had visions of the Constitutional la Fayette, in his cocked hat, astride of his white charger, and partly of academicians brought up on the "Contrat Social,"—mere physiocratic theorists who dreamt of a kind of delicate machinery such as that conceived by the Abbot Sieyès as being suitable to their own ponderous Russia. Like children, they merely played at being conspirators, but the game ended tragically; for sooner or later they all expiated the crime of having held these chimeric hopes, in exile in Siberia or elsewhere.

The revolutionary spirit then slept for twenty years. When it woke up again it had visions of another kind. This time it aimed at completely recasting our poor old world. The Russians now received from Europe the dogmas of democracy and socialism, embracing them with all the more ardour because they responded to all the natural instincts of their race and to all the desires of their heart. But they could not see that such foreign alliances were against their best and most natural interests. Bewildered by the Western socialistic writings, the revolutionaries of 1848 got "drunk on bad ink" and morally expatriated themselves into a sterile desert of abstractions and negations. International theories made them lose sight of Russian requirements. Their declamations on behalf of the Russian people had a false ring about them, for these Muscovite Jacobites were filled with the rationalistic and irreligious spirit of the eighteenth century. They had nothing in common with the evangelical pity of a

Dostoyevsky, or a Tolstoy, which treated the hackneyed views of the opposition with contempt. Those were indeed loving and gentle "realists." The others were odious fanatics in whom love of humanity had turned into hatred of society. I think the best way for distinguishing between the Russian writers at this period is to look on them as being in two separate camps—one situated without and the other within Russia.

Prior to 1848 the distinctions were rather difficult to observe, and as a matter of fact the actual separation only came about later, after the first fever of enthusiasm had passed away and the youths had attained to a more settled appreciation of the situation. The leaders of the first rank in the Left Wing were Belinsky, Herzen and Bakunin.

After 1843, Belinsky drifts more and more towards atheism and discontent. He was then styled the Russian Marat. But for a pulmonary complaint from which he died in 1847 he would probably, like many of his friends, have ended his days in Siberia. Herzen boldly published his ideas, in a philosophical novel, entitled *Whose Fault?* On the eve of February 24 he leaves St. Petersburg, takes part, as a volunteer, in the revolutions at Rome and Paris, and thence as a contributor to the *Contemporary* writes his *Letters from the Avenue Marigny.* In 1849 he writes for Proudhon's *Voice of the People,* and publishes his most stirring work, *From the Other Bank;* a passionate attack on the Government of his native country. Proclaimed, and deprived of all his estates, he becomes the Russian member of the Revolutionary Committee, of which Mazzini, Kossuth, Ledru-Rollin and Orsini are conspicuous members. Herzen was one of those whose actions were preferably confined to the movements of the pen. His clever pamphlet, *The Bell,* caused some anxiety and amusement, but for a long time only among the governing classes, for his talent was too subtle to take a firm hold of the masses.

Bakunin was thoroughly Russian and loved revolution

for revolution's sake, just like Barbés, a French conspirator by profession, for the fun of the thing. He adopted the device—

"The desire to destroy is the desire to create."

Hegelian of the "right," then of the "left," he moves on to Germany about 1841. He finds the Germans too dreamy, comes on to Paris, takes sides with the Poles, and is then expelled by M. Guizot. To justify himself this serious statesman, when referring to the Russian, makes use of a phrase which endears us to all Parliamentary terms: "He is a violent personality!" I should think so!

Bakunin returns to France soon after 1848 and associates himself with the most advanced political groups. Referring to him, the notorious Caussidière admiringly exclaims: "Behold! What a man! On the first day of the revolution he is invaluable—the next he ought to be shot."

He then goes on to Prague, there to preach socialistic pan-Slavism, and fights with the rebels against the troops under Windischgrätz. Escaping from the clutches of the Austrian police, he flies to Dresden to take part in the revolutions there. One day during that flight he sees some peasants in revolt laying siege to a landlord's castle. Without making any inquiries he jumps out of his cart, organizes the rebels (he had served as an officer of artillery), joins them in setting fire to the house, and resumes his journey. Condemned to death, commuted to imprisonment, the Saxon Government hands him over to the Austrians, who keep him in prison for ten months without being able to extract any information out of him. Austria hands him over to Russia, where he is thrown into the dungeons of the St. Petersburg citadel. Alexander II, coming into power, sends him to Siberia. He escapes thence in 1860 and returns to Europe to stir up there the

revolutionary movement. M. Guizot was right. Bakunin is indeed " a violent personality ! "

There are others who, though less violent, may yet be considered as implicated with the revolutionary advance guard of the Mad 'Forties. At intervals of two or three years, all these young writers of the realistic school come forward, each with his own socialistic novel.

They all have a bitter flavour and have strong revolutionary tendencies. They owe much to the influence of George Sand and Eugène Sue, whilst in form remaining faithful to the realism dictated by Gogol. Soltikoff Schchedrin, the satirist whose humorous writings have since met with so much success in Russia, begins his reputation with his *Complications.* It is the story of a poor woman who sells herself to secure the necessaries of life for her husband and child. Grigorovich in his *Anton Goremuika,* dramatizes the mujik's everyday life—by rendering into prose the awful scenes written by Nekrasoff in verse. Turgeneff reproduces them with more discreet touches in his *Tales of a Hunter.* Dostoyevsky publishes *Poor Folk.* Pisemsky's first novel, *The Days of the Boyards,* is a plea for free love, obviously inspired by the author of *Indiana,* and in every respect similar to Herzen's novel *Whose Fault?*

Whilst the storytellers were enchanting the imagination, Petrashevsky was preparing a more serious instrument of war, in his *Dictionary of Foreign Terms.* It is an engine of destruction borrowed from the literary tactics of the last century, and it was hoped that it would realize the great results obtained by Voltaire's *Dictionary of Philosophy.* Petrashevsky's name is irrevocably connected with the conspiracy of 1848, of which he was the very soul. This abortive attempt was the end of all those effervescent ideas. When coming to Dostoyevsky's biography I shall naturally have to refer to this episode again.

This put an end to the dreams of the 'Forties. Russia

returned to her slumbers. A merciless Imperialism repressed the least sign of intellectuality, which indeed only revived after the death of the Emperor Nicholas. The most noted revolutionaries had found safety abroad. The writers under suspicion, and they were all that, were dispersed, several following Petrushevsky into Siberia. Amongst the more fortunate were Turgeneff banished to his own estates, and Soltikoff to Viatka. The Slavophiles as a whole did not escape chastisement. Samarin was sent to a fortress for having written his *Letters from Riga*, in which he criticized the recently adopted system of Government in the Baltic provinces—intended to crush all German influence. Hamekoff was forbidden to publish or to publicly recite his verses " except to his own mother." Cherkasky and Aksakoff were placed under police supervision. The long beards which are a part of the Muscovite "patriotism" shared no better fate than those who advocated them: they were forbidden. Government stopped all further "scientific missions," as also the pilgrimages to the German universities which had been such a failure.

Peter the Great forced his subjects abroad that they might breathe European air; as stringently Nicholas kept his back. Passports, for which the exorbitant sum of £50 had to be paid, could only be obtained with the greatest difficulty. The teaching of philosophy was proscribed in all the schools and in all the universities of the empire, admission to which had now been reduced in numbers. The classics were similarly ostracized. Historical publications were put under a censor's control, which was tantamount to a prohibition. No history of modern times, *i. e.* of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, was allowed to be taught in any form whatsoever.

As to the Press, it is easy to imagine what summary dealings it received at this juncture. The whole of Russia possessed but seven daily newspapers, and they contained

only the most trivial and inoffensive matters. With difficulty can one find the least allusion to the war with Hungary, or later with the wars in Asia. The first leading article of any note appeared in 1857 in the *Northern Bee.*

This innovation was so daring that it took the censors unawares. The rigorous methods and puerilities of the censor would make an amusing chapter to read. The word "liberty" was everywhere in whatever connection it occurred at once struck out, as was the word "King" in the Days of Terror—identical childishness, whether from on high or from below. The unacceptable titles of operas were altered. Pocket-handkerchiefs were seized by the Customs as contraband because they had the portraits of the Pope and foreign sovereigns printed on them.

These years, known as those of the "Censor's Terror," have made the Russians a laughing stock everywhere. Those, however, who suffered from these measures still retained the warmth of enthusiasm and illusions of their youth; but being forbidden to express their real feelings they also retained a tinge of bitterness in all their future work. Moreover, the vaunted relaxation of the rigors of censorship, in the reign of Alexander II, was really only nominal.

The above explains how, on their awakening in 1854, the writers, regaining courage, returned instinctively to the novel as being the only remaining method for expressing their ideas—to be read between the lines. It is in this pleasing form only that we find a summary of the ideas afloat in Modern Russia whether on philosophy, history or politics. I must insist on this, for it in a measure justifies the length I have thought fit to give this book, and for so often impressing on the reader the true meaning of these works of pure fiction. In the novel, and there only, will he find Russian history of the last fifty years. Reading these novelists from that point of view, we enter

into the circumstances of a public for whom these novels were written.

That public reasons and feels according to special laws, which are no longer ours. We, when taking up a novel, expect to find it a work of art, in the same way as any other art is appreciated in the state of civilization in which we are living—a refined time-killer, a diversion among the interests of real life, easy to read and understand, but imparting surface impressions only. We read such books in the same way as a passer-by, going on his own business, looks at the exposed goods in a shop window. But in Russia they read their authors in quite a different way. What is to us a superfluous luxury is to them the soul's daily bread. It is the golden age of the greater literature experienced by all young nations, in Asia and in Greece during the Middle Ages. The writer is the guide of his race, the master of a multitude of confused ideas, and in a small measure the constructor of their language. He is the poet in the ancient and comprehensive term of the word—*vates*—poet and prophet. Simple-minded readers, as well as the more serious, newly arrived into the world of thought, eager to go forward, full of illusions as to the power of the human genius, require from their intellectual guide a doctrine, a reason for living, a complete revelation of the ideal. In Russia the upper circles, small and select, have long since acquired, or possibly even surpassed, our own dilettantism, but the lower classes are only commencing to read, and read with avidity, with faith, and hope, as we read *Robinson Crusoe* at the age of twelve. As a certain novelist styled them, they are "virgin soil." Sensitive imaginations receive their first impressions from the book in hand. Their imaginations are not deadened, as with us, by the vastness of our means of education. Journalism has not scattered their thoughts and destroyed the power of concentration. They do not criticize, therefore they have faith. After reading *Father and Son* or *War and*

Peace we say to ourselves : " It is only a novel." But to the tradesman in Moscow or the son of the village priest, to the small landholder, whose bookshelves contain volumes of Pushkin, Gogol or Nekrasoff, representing the encyclopædia of the human mind—each of the first-named volumes become one of the books in the National Bible. They understand the importance and epical significance of the part played by Esther on behalf of her own people the Jews, the part of Ulysses on behalf of the Athenian, the part played by the romances of *la Rose*, or of *Renart* in the days of our ancestors.

I trust I may be forgiven these general remarks, but they were necessary before approaching the three great figures, with whom actually rests the merit of inducing the popular acceptance of the novel. Many others among these writers in the 'Forties also deserve to be studied—men who after 1854 have also attained to their destined renown.

Chief among such is Goncharoff, the author of a very characteristic novel, *Oblomoff*, also Pisemsky, whose chief works, *Thousand Souls* and *In the Whirlwind*, have just been translated into French. There is also Ostrovsky, an author and novelist of the comedy type, the master of Russian theatres for the last thirty years. Closely following on these are Sologub, Grigorovich, and Pechersky, the chronicler of ecclesiastic and conventual life; also Potieshin and his imitators of the *Narodniki*—who prefer the more common customs and scenes. They all deserve more than merely a few lines in a work devoted entirely to their leaders, so I may well ask them to wait awhile. But we shall get an idea of their tendencies when studying and comparing the two of the larger groups between which they oscillate. Dostoyevsky will show us what the Slavophil and national schools think. Turgeneff will show us how others were able to remain Russian without quarrelling with the West, and how to remain realistic yet artistic and admirers of the ideal. He has come out of the school

of Liberalism, which claims him. But this incomparable artist gradually stands out from among his surroundings, and rises above all local bickerings.

II

A particular sound, or a shade of colour striking ear or eye, though insignificant in itself, often leaves its mark upon the soul. One summer's day, in Little Russia, my post-horses were being changed. I asked the station-master's daughter for some light refreshment. She was a small Ukraina girl, dressed in the graceful costume of her native country, playing with the old silver rouble hanging by a string round her neck. She went and brought a decanter half filled with water. As she filled my glass the silver coin struck the neck of the bottle, giving out a clear note, so soft and musical! It seemed to please the girl, for she smiled and tried to make it ring again. As I drove off I heard the slowly dying, pearly notes, more like the call of a lonely nightingale in the slumbering summer's eve of this dumb land.

More than once when reading Turgeneff's books, I remembered that gentle caress of the silver trinket on the crystal. For they too give out the gentle note that caresses a soul when struck by pleasing thought. Marvellous instrument removed too soon! Russia has taken back what was so nearly ours. She has returned him to her own deafening silence! The winters as they come round enshroud her in a heavy pall of snow. That immense crude Russia, where sheets of ice quickly seal up the graves and deep snow keeps out the noises of the living! It seems, indeed, as if nature had taught her much better than all other countries how to abolish the memory of the dead. It is not for her to be asked to be "lighter

than ashes," as written on the epitaph on Hérédia's young "Greek girl"! And yet Turgeneff was in despair at the thought of dying elsewhere. He loved her so! His mother Russia! His best productions were directly inspired by his native soil, in which everything spoke to him in poesy. There is not a page in any of his books in which, as Griboyedoff expresses it, one cannot smell "the smoke of one's home."

For a long time his generation preferred him to any other author. It would be wrong to assign the reason for this loyalty to any special talent. How many amongst his uneducated readers care a jot for talent, form or delicacy of ideas? In political writings, the people instinctively follow that man whom they feel to be one of themselves, of their own flesh and blood and mind, and imbued with the same qualities, good or bad. Turgeneff personified all the striking qualities of the true Russian race, its spontaneous goodness of heart, natural simplicity and self-resignation. He was commonly called in Russia "a good soul," for that powerful brain ruled the heart of a child. Whenever I came into his presence I seemed so well to understand the Evangelist's meaning regarding the "simple-minded," and how such a mind can ally itself to science and all the exquisite gifts that make up an artist. Devotion, generosity of heart and pocket, brotherly affection, were all part of his natural organism. To our circumspect and complicated world, where everybody wears case-hardened armour for the struggle of life, he seemed entirely out of place, as if he belonged to a pastoral tribe from beyond the Ural Mountains; a big child, gentle, dreamy, so like a shepherd leisurely following his flock of grazing sheep on the steppe.

In appearance he was a tall, sedate old man, with rough features on a fine head, dear to sculptors, with an introspective look in his eyes and reminding one of the ideal patriarchal Russian peasant seated at the family table,

ennobled only because of his intellectual power, just like one of the peasants of old, who after turning monks became saints, and are ever after seen immortalized on church window legends, adorned with a golden halo and always in the dignified attitude of prayer. The first time I came across this magnificent giant, a true symbol of his country, I found it difficult to define my impressions. I seemed to see and hear a *mujik*, having a spark of genius, who could have risen to the highest spiritual spheres without losing any of his natural candour by the way. He, at least, who loved his own people so much, would not have been aggrieved by such a comparison.

And now, as I take up my pen to write about him, I feel inclined to throw it down again! I have already said that this man was entirely good. Why, then, in God's name, add anything more? Of what further use are other eulogies, and of what use after all the brightness of intellect we make so much of? But that heart has ceased beating. Those who knew him are few in number, and they are but human. They, too, will soon forget and die. It is necessary, therefore, to show others all that he has left on record of himself in the field of imagination.

His work was considerable, and proves that he had a persevering nature. The last complete edition[1] comprises ten volumes of romance, novels, essays, dramatical and critical. Of these volumes, those most worthy of the honour have been translated into French, under the author's direct supervision. This fact makes Turgeneff the sole Russian author who affords the pleasure of being discussed in France, among the initiated. No foreigner has been so much read and liked in Paris; this gives a French side to his great fame.

The name of Turgeneff has been famous in literature ever since the beginning of the century. An elderly

[1] Edition by Brothers Salayef, 10 vols. 8vo. Moscow, 1880.

cousin of his, Nicolas Ivanovich (Turgeneff), after having made his mark in the Government service at the time of Alexander I, was implicated in the conspiracy of the Decembrists in 1825, and was exiled by the Emperor Nicholas. He lived the remainder of his days in Paris, where he published his great work *Russia and the Russians*. He was an honest soul, distinguished, a little narrow and idealistic. He was one of the most sincere among the many of that generation who took up the cause of Liberalism after 1812. Remaining loyal to his friends who expiated their idealism in Siberia, this outlaw became their advocate and defender of their theories, at a distance. He persistently continued to plead for the emancipation of the serfs. His young cousin then but carried on the family traditions, when with the first appearance of his book he sounded the death-knell of serfdom.

The Turgeneff family lived as gentlefolk on their estates in the province of Orel. Turgeneff, born in 1818, grew up there in full freedom and in solitude. This Orel, often so pleasantly described by the writer, is indeed a pleasant country. It is still in Greater Russia, but one feels that the southern sky is not far off. The northern climate, rough and severe, here unites with the milder currents from the south, and tries hard to smile and to behave decently. The area known as the " black soil " of Russia begins here. The boundless cultivated plains in summer appear like a sea of gold. The oak is met with and seems to give strength to the more delicate outlines of the birch trees. To the east, towards Elets and the sources of the Don, there are pleasing valleys, at night all alight with camp-fires and alive with the neighing of horses; for Orel is one of the great rearing places, where the low-lying pastures are overrun in summer by peasants and their studs. To the west, the river Desna flows amongst the ancient forests of Chernigoff—past the monasteries of Briansk. This beautiful stream then

flows on and on amongst pine and aspen as dense as centuries of growth can make them, for miles and miles. Those never-ending Russian miles! The damp soil in these forest lands are in the spring-time covered with rich pastures and flowers such as I have not seen anywhere else in the whole world. Hardly has the snow been melted in the sun of the lengthening days, than the rich soil enters into the joys of love and creation. The sap flows here as in the veins of youth; triumphant life bursts forth amidst the trees amidst a blaze of colour, sweet odours and gentle murmurings. Nature's intoxication bewilders man. The hunter or the charcoal burner losing his way in these flowery thickets seems so insignificant, so paltry!

Scattered about, in the cultivated areas, are found the "Nests of the Landlords," all built alike. A large main building in wood or brick, on a high terrace, and a heavy zinc roof flanked by a tall bell tower, or when less pretentious by a wing at the back. The entire building is whitewashed, and dazzles under the green painted roof. Sometimes the "Lord" is rich and is able to keep up repairs. More often than not the mortgagees batten on these properties, as proved by multitudes of lizards, gaping walls, wooden buttresses, and the tares and thistles growing on the terraces. Behind the house, an avenue of lime trees leads to the high road. In front a green plot or an orchard of beans and willows slopes gently towards a pond of stagnant water in the bottom of the hollow. It looks as if no wind had ever been able to ripple its surface among the rushes. Calm and silent as the life of the family which vegetates near by, it merely reflects the cloud as it passes overhead, rose-coloured in the morning, grey in the day-time. Should the family disappear, this ancient mirror would continue to reflect their image and respond to the memories of the children who played and grew up on its borders. This is the reason, perhaps,

why the Russian clings so to his humble home, the cradle of his family. And when later on he runs round the world, his naturally restless soul is ever drawn to this monotonous horizon.

Turgeneff's childhood was passed in one of these homes, the " nest " which nearly always figures in his novels. In accordance with the then prevailing fashion, he had French and German tutors, poor wretches obtained anyhow, who taught of what they knew not and who in all the large houses were kept as part of the ordinary retinue. The mother tongue was not held in high esteem.

The first time he read Russian verses, as a boy, was in secret, with an old family servant. Fortunately, his real education was among the sweet heather and among the hunters whose tales eventually were incorporated in one of his masterpieces. Whilst running through the woods and bogs after game, the poet was laying up a fund of mental pictures, and unconsciously collected the outlines which he was eventually to re-clothe with his own ideas. In some children, whilst the power of reasoning is still dormant, they yet get their impressions drop by drop, as dew that falls during the night, and with the dawn is turned into diamonds with the first rays of the sun.

When the time came to begin his more serious education, Turgeneff was sent to school at Moscow and thence to the St. Petersburg University. Like his contemporaries, he too went to " finish " in Germany, and in 1838 we find him digesting the philosophies of Kant and Hegel.

His state of mind at this time is made known to us in a short autobiography published at the beginning of his works. Notwithstanding the embarrassing phraseology which encumbers all Russian authors when publishing anything of a delicate nature, this fragment reveals the secret of an entire generation, and indicates in which of the two camps the author is going to plant his flag.

"The movement which sent the young men of my generation abroad, makes one think of the days when the ancient Slavs went to look for their leaders among the Vikings beyond the sea. Each one of us felt that his '*possession*'—by this I do not mean our native country as a whole, but each one's intellectual and moral patrimony—*was great and rich, but disorganised.*[1] As regards myself, I may say that I strongly resented all the disadvantages of such a transmigration from our native soil; of this violent rupture of all the bonds that held me to the surroundings in which I grew up . . . but there was nothing else to do. The life and the surroundings generally—and specially in the sphere to which I belonged, that of country proprietors and in the midst of serfdom—held nothing to keep me back. On the contrary, nearly everything I saw around me created a feeling of dissatisfaction, even of rebellion—of disgust. I did not hesitate long. It was either a case of submission and sticking quietly to the ordinary beaten track, or of a sudden uprooting and forsaking all and everything, even of much that was dear to my heart. This is what I chose, and I 'took a header into the German Ocean' that was to cleanse and regenerate me. And when I eventually arose from out of these waters I had become a 'Western,' which I have remained ever since. . . . It was impossible for me to remain and breathe the same air that gave life to everything I abhorred. Possibly I was wanting in character or force of will, but it was absolutely necessary for me to get clear of my enemy, the better to strike from a distance. To my eyes this enemy had a formidable appearance and had an ordinary name. My enemy was the 'lawfulness' of Serfdom. Under that name I included everything which I was going to fight against to the end—with which I had sworn never to make peace. It was my 'Hannibal

[1] This is the historic phrase, proverbial in Russia, which the Slavs aforesaid used when asking the Vikings to come and rule over them.

oath '—and in those days I was not the only one to take that oath. I went to Germany to enable me to fulfil it."

This is decisive. The author as a "Western" will hold for Japhet as against Shem, for the methods of Peter the Great as against the "patriots" entrenched behind their Chinese wall. One has to be well acquainted with Russian affairs, and their curious terminological expressions, to understand thoroughly what a storm such an inoffensive word is capable of raising—what a flood of ink and bile it causes to flow every day. The appellation "Western" signifies, according to the camp in which one quarters, a "son of light" or an "accursed traitor." I shall take good care not to justify either view, especially as to my mind it seems a mere quarrel of words. Combatants blinded by smoke soon cease fighting on recognizing each other, and when cooled down. Reason, good laws and good literature have no defined limits. Everybody can find what he wants in the common fund of humanity and fashions it to his own liking.

In reading that fragmentary confession one feels somewhat anxious about the poet's future. At the back of those sentences there seems to be a growl of a political nature. Is this powerful suborner going to turn him out of his true path? Fortunately not. Turgeneff was much too literary inclined, too dreamy and detached to throw himself into a fight in which one begins with having strong "convictions" and comes out of it with mere "interests." But he kept strictly to one point of his oath, and delivered a blow, and a terrible blow it was, against serfage. Against that enemy it was a Holy War, and all had already connived at it.

Returned to Russia, Turgeneff published his first attempts, as a matter of course in rhyme, in the ordinary "reviews" of the day. He at once received encouragement from Belinsky, and made friends with him. The voice of this young Muse, however, did not carry far, and

it soon died away. The writer then made an heroic sacrifice. He discarded verse—so completely that this master of prose has not included a single rhyme in any of the finally authorized editions of his works. He was less strict, however, with regard to a few farces and comedies composed about this time; but when giving his editors the needful permission, he modestly assures us that he makes no claim to dramatic talent. And his disavowal is well founded, for that voice, restrained and subtle, so eloquent when found in the intimacies of a book, was not fitted for the thunderings of the stage. One or two of his pieces were actually produced and played, but they soon disappeared. Returning to foreign lands, Turgeneff from there sent to a St. Petersburg "review" the first of those small stories, *Tales of a Hunter*, which were to make his name.

One after another, between 1847 and 1851, these little firebrands in poetic garb slipped forth, apparently harmless. At first the public did not understand the covert meaning, and the vigilance of the Censor was also at fault. They seemed to be but a superior literary attempt of a new kind in Russia. There can be no doubt that Gogol's influence was to be seen in the newcomer's style, especially in his understanding of the natural. The *Cottage Evenings* had evidently been taken as a model. Always the everlasting melancholy symphony of the Russian country life, but this time the artist's interpretation was of another sort. It was no longer Gogol's stinging "humour," or his plain and frank description of the people's daily life, or the hot "fusees" of enthusiasm suddenly extinguished by ironic "calls to order!" Turgeneff's style was neither boisterous nor enthusiastic. It had a more discreet tone. The emotions were veiled and disguised. The country and the people were shown in the dim evening light, seen through a vapour of ideals, clearly defined, however, and exactly as they struck the retina of

the observer's eye. The language is richer, more refined, softer, with a neatness such as no writer had hitherto mastered. It is not the simple and limpid prose of Pushkin, a student of Voltaire's, who had a good memory. Turgeneff's sentences run smoothly, slowly, and voluptuously, like the surface of those great Russian forest rivers eddying among the rushes and carrying floating flowers, empty bird's-nests and fleeting perfumes; often reflecting extended vistas of sky and landscape, and suddenly disappearing into the darker shadows. This sentence is intended to gather up all there is in the humming of the bees, the song of the night bird, a passing zephyr, which caresses and dies away. The most fugitive chords in Nature's grand symposium are harmoniously transmuted by the infinite resources of the Russian keyboard—those flexible epithets, words cemented together with poetic fantasy, making the sound resembling words so acceptable to the popular ear.

I dwell on what gives the book its singular force. It is but a song of the earth and the murmurings of a few untutored souls brought directly to our notice. He has taken us into the very heart of his own native home and leaves us there face to face with it. He himself does not appear; nevertheless, if it is not himself we see, who is it who has been able to conceive this mystic poesy known as yet to so few, and which has here been so clearly reproduced?

The *Tales of a Hunter* have charmed many a French reader, though they have been discoloured by translation and ignorance of the country! I figure to myself an educated man of Kieff or Kazan, who had never crossed the frontier, reading in Russian the rural novels of George Sand, which after all have some affinity with those of Turgeneff. But how much would he understand of *La Petite Fadette* and of *François le Champi?* How would he be able to observe the scenic beauty of our Berry? One has

to live in the country described by Turgeneff to admire how on every page he corroborates our personal impressions, how he brings back to our soul every emotion experienced, and to our senses every subtle odour breathed in that country.

From among the stories I will select the short one called *Bejin Lug*. It is the name given to the prairie, to which the young peasants bring their studs of horses to graze during the hot summer season. Our Hunter has lost his way in the evening mists, and strays for a long time in the lonely lands, at the mercy of shadowy illusions. At last he sees a fire burning in the marshland and recognizes it as the camping-ground of the smaller owners. The stranger joins them and lies down to rest near the fire. Feigning sleep, he overhears their conversation. Huddled round the burning logs, those children tell stories—midnight tales. It is not that they are afraid. Oh! No! Only the occasional mysterious noises they hear set their minds at work—nocturnal noises from the rivers whence the osprey calls, the barking of dogs when wolves slink by the tethered horses. The presence of the invisible acts upon their simple souls, and they at once rehearse the superstitions current in every Russian village. They bring up the *russalkis*, the mermaids, the wood nymphs, the forest sprites, the *domovoy*—a kind of banshee. They refer to their chum Vania who last year drowned himself, and is now calling the fishermen down into the deep currents. These tales find a place between ordinary nursery tales and stories of Hoffmann's, and yet they are something else, for they are more natural and far more serious. The poet, with infinite skill, brings them to the intended pitch. He has made the earth speak of its own children, and it happens that the earth and the children speak the same language, for these young men are but the interpreters of the old Slav world. They but recast, in their own way, the *Song of Igor*, that ancient pantheistic epic whence

flows all Russian poetry. Meanwhile the night passes, when the minds are at rest. But day returns and stirs the soul again. The story ends with an admirable description of the rising sun throwing a lurid light on this fantastic symphony written throughout in a minor key.

Do you wish for anything more human and more inward? Then read again the *Living Relics*. Entering by chance an abandoned shed, the Hunter beholds a miserable creature—shapeless and helpless. He recognizes an old servant of his mother's, once a beautiful and radiant girl, now paralysed and ravaged by some strange disease. This forlorn skeleton lying prostrate in this ruined hovel is without a single earthly tie. No one cares for it. Some good folk now and then fill the water jug; it has no other want. It seemingly lives, if living it be, by the merest breath—"similar to the murmurings of the sedge in the swamp." But in this relic of a body there is a soul purified by sufferings, filled with divine resignation, elated—without in any way detracting from its simplicity—to the glorious height of absolute renunciation. Lukerya relates her story. How she was suddenly seized by her illness after a fall one night when she had gone to listen to the nightingale's song. How one by one all the pleasures of life had then left her. How it had vexed her affianced lover, who naturally enough soon married another. What else could he have done? She indeed hopes he is very happy. For many years her only distraction was to hear the church bells ring and the hum of the bees in the hives close by! Sometimes a swallow flutters into the shed: it is a great event and sets her thinking for weeks. The people who bring her water to drink are so kind, and she is so grateful to them!—Then gradually with growing pleasure she harks back with her young master to the joys of former times. She reminds him with a certain amount of pride that once she was the best dancer in the village, and had the best

voice. She ends by expressing a wish to make an attempt at singing one of her old songs.[1]

"The thought of this old hag, half dead, wishing to sing, involuntarily evoked feelings of terror within me. Before I could say a word, a long-drawn sound, hardly perceptible, but pure and true, came tremblingly to my ear. . . . Followed by another—then again one more. . . . Lukerya was singing *On the Prairie*. She sang without the slightest change of expression in her pitiful countenance with eyes steadily fixed. This poor cracked and feeble voice, wavering like a wreath of smoke, sounded so painful as it tried its best to express all that the soul contained! . . . My fear had fled and an indescribable feeling of pity clutched at my heart."

Lukerya further relates her bad dreams: how her death appeared to her in a vision. Not that it was at all a matter to be frightened at. On the contrary, she is sorry that it receded and refused her the deliverance she sought. She refuses all offers of assistance made by her young master, she desires nothing, she is content with all and everything. As the visitor was leaving she called him back for a last word—woman-like. She is conscious of having caused him a horrible impression by her appearance, and she tries to find in herself something which would remind him of her womanhood. "You remember, my lord, the fine tresses I once had? . . . You know they came quite down to my knees. . . . For a long time I hesitated, but what else could I do in my circumstances? . . . I cut them off. Yes. . . . Good-bye, my lord."

There is nothing here left to analyse, one might as well try and seize a butterfly wing. The thread of the story is so fragile, so simple. It is almost nothing, and yet it is marvellous for what it contains, or rather for what it does not contain. Given the subject, I can imagine how different

[1] All these extracts, and the following have been translated direct from the original.

schools of literature would have worked it out. A romanticist of the good old style would have held up to our view the dreadful effect of fatality on the poor creature. He would have violently protested against such an ordering of the Universe, that remorseless monster, a female Quasimodo. Others, the illustrious friends of Turgeneff's old age, would not have failed to give us a pathological discourse. They would have minutely dissected every rigid limb, and diagnosed every secret malady. They would have indicated every cause of failure of the nervous system, and ended idiotically. Another writer, with a transcendental nature would have transfigured this old woman into a martyr. She would have appeared to us with a nimbus, lost in mystic contemplation and miraculously kept alive by a celestial power !

There is nothing of this with Turgeneff. He glides gently over all physical suffering, in veiled words he enshrouds the living corpse. We understand easily enough that it is a corpse that is before us when we see the naked soul, outside its flesh. No declamation, no antithesis, the author uses nothing to strengthen the horrors of the case or to spur our imagination. It is a mere ordinary instance of life—no more ! The poor woman's conception of the Almighty admits the belief that He has many things to occupy himself with, besides her own little troubles, and she prays to him as usual, without making any special request, with a simple peasant's piety, quite foreign to the appeals of a mystic. The chief point brought to our notice in the story, as in most of the others, is the stoical resignation, bordering on that of the animal, manifested by this peasant woman always prepared to undergo suffering. The skill shewn lies in the exquisite proportions given to realism and to the ideal. Almost every detail remains realistic, and yet the whole is bathed in idealism.

See also, further on, another angelic sufferer as contained

in the story of *The Village Doctor*. There it is again, the same correct balance; man kept in his natural attitude, with feet chained to the earth, but looking longingly upwards into the sky!

When these stories were collected in one volume, the public, till then undecided as to their purport, at once understood their real meaning. Somebody had come who dared to amplify the hidden meaning, disguised by Gogol's sinister jocular style, in *Dead Souls*. What other name can we give to this portrait gallery collected by the Hunter? Here are the same small landlords, plainly selfish and harsh; the cunning agents, the same grasping dismissed State officials; under this same iron rule, the same pitiful helots, robbed of almost every human condition, afflicted with misery and yet ever submissive.

The process—there is always a process, however well disguised—is invariably the same. The author passes through his magic lantern, and shows us in all its phases, a comical creature, now laughable, now pitiable, careless, without resource, condemned to a shadowy existence. Alongside of this serf stands the master, odd and half civilized, in other respects a good enough fellow, unconscious of the wrongs being committed; entirely the victim of the established facts of his surroundings which lead him astray. Such a picture, which should have been ugly and repulsive, the writer has clothed with grace and charm in some ways unwittingly, due to the delicacy of his poetic sense.

Why were the mainsprings of life in each of his heroes broken? How came this moral malaria to spread all over Russia? What was the name of the pestilential disease? It was left to the reader to give it a name.

It would not be correct to say that Turgeneff *attacked* serfdom. By reason of their own acumen and of the "press" laws that apply to them—no Russian writers

overtly attack anything direct, nor do they argue or denounce. They merely depict without arriving at any conclusions—and appeal to the feelings of compassion rather than to those of anger.

Fifteen years later, when Dostoyevsky comes to publishing his *Recollections of the House of the Dead*—that terrible personal recollection of ten years in Siberia—he writes just in the same way, without uttering a single rebellious word, without a drop of gall, appearing to find all he writes about as quite natural, perhaps a little sad. This is the national characteristic in everything.

I once stopped at Orel for the night, in the very heart of the author's country. I was awakened by the roll of drum, and I looked out into the market-place, in the centre of which a large wooden gallows, black of colour, had been erected, and was surrounded on all four sides by troops. On the scaffold stood three poor devils, round their necks a paper announcing the nature of their crime. These wretches seemed subdued and quite unconscious of what was going to happen to them. Roped to the uprights behind them they looked quite handsome with their Slavonic Christ-like heads. The exhibition lasted some time. The clergy came out to bless them, and when the cart came to take them back to prison soldiers and people rushed after them, overwhelmed them with provisions and small coins and loudly pitied them from their hearts. In Russia the writer who wants to be a reformer must act as does the law—by melancholy public exhibitions accompanied with signs of indulgence for the evils exposed. They exhibit and the public takes the hint.

This time they thoroughly understood, and Russia, seeing itself in the mirror of serfdom as now exposed, was horror-struck. A shiver passed right through the entire land. In one night the author became famous and his cause was half won. The Censor was the last to understand, but eventually he too understood, even he! Russia's suscepti-

bility may be a matter of astonishment to the reader, but I say again, she was touched down to the Emperor Nicholas's very heart, and serfdom was doomed for ever! We must know, however, that the Censor does not always desire what the Emperor wills; at least he desires to go slow, and is often a reign behindhand. The Censor abandoned the idea of dealing severely with the book, but he kept a watch on the author. Gogol having meanwhile died, Turgeneff honoured him with a warmly eulogistic obituary. To-day this article would appear inoffensive enough. It is contained in the *Complete Edition*, and we should find it difficult to discover the crime, had not the offender revealed the mystery in a rather amusing reminiscence of later days, thus:

"With regard to this article, I remember one day, in St. Petersburg, when a highly placed lady criticized the punishment inflicted on me, thinking it unmerited or at least excessive. As she was getting hot in my defence, some one said to her: 'You forget, Madam, that in that article he called Gogol a "Great Man"!—Is that really possible?—I assure you he did.—Oh, well, in that case there is nothing more to be said. I am sorry, but I quite understand that one had to be severe!'"

This impertinent qualification applied to a mere scribbler caused Turgeneff a month's arrest accompanied with the advice to ruminate awhile on his estate. I fancy he then realized how imperfect the social conditions were. So unjust are we to the powers that be who wish us well! . . . It must nevertheless be admitted that these powers usually serve our interests better than we serve our own; moreover all arbitrary acts are generally in harmony with the views of Providence! Thirty years before an order to go into exile had saved Pushkin by tearing him away from the dissipations of St. Petersburg, where he was fast ruining his genius; his being sent to the sunny East was the means of that very genius coming to maturity. Had

Turgeneff remained in the capital, the young blood in his veins and his compromising friendships would probably have dragged him into some futile political trouble. Alone in his forests, and by compulsion living a solitary life, he spent several years laboriously studying the humble life in the Russian provinces and immortalizing them in his first great novel.

III

Turgeneff assures us that he never liked Balzac. That is quite likely. They differed in every respect, and the pupil does not always like his master, but I am convinced that as a pupil of Gogol's and an adept in the "natural school" he had after all taken some hints from our own great writer. The Russian set to work also to write the comedy of his own country. To this great task he brought less patience, less method and a smaller grasp of the whole subject than the Frenchman, but showed more feeling, greater faith and the gift of a penetrating eloquence which was not possessed by the other. If it is true that no French historian is able to give us a correct view of our ancestors without having first read Balzac, it is even more so in the case of Russia and Turgeneff. Yonder, I repeat, contemporaneous history was dumb; and with good reason.

When the historians of the future wish to revivify the Russia of Nicholas and the first years of Alexander II's reign, they will be discouraged at realizing the complete absence of first-hand records, but they will find an author who is able to bring the dead past before them, whose testimony is reliable inasmuch as he ably discerned the ideas current among his contemporaries and embodied them in the characters of his books. Between 1850 and 1860 Russia was still feeling its way anxiously, like a lost traveller on a dark night. The horizon held the pale light of dawn,

a glimpse of a road or two, and dimly defined summits were to be seen on all sides. These morning hours became confused by the impetuosity of some, the lassitude and the want of courage in others. It would require a sharp pair of eyes to delineate the figures of those emerging out of this shadow-land and of those who voluntarily retreated into the dark, never to appear again. Turgeneff was successful with several of them. Let us briefly glance at them by turning over the pages of the novels written by him at this time.

In the first, *Rudin*, the author shows us a temperament, common to every time and every country, but which seems to have been specially acclimatized in Russia. Rudin, the hero, is an eloquent idealist, full of words, incapable of action. He fuddles himself and others with his continual talk, and throws himself into the affairs of the world like a tornado composed of generous and brilliant ideas. But everything goes against him. With a character formed on the highest principles, with no other vice than that of simple-mindedness, he yet commits acts unworthy of a gentleman. He might be taken for a cynic, living on his dupes; for a seducer, and submitting to the outrages of a rival; and yet he is but his own dupe, for at bottom he is honest enough to keep from exacting all he is entitled to. Without courage for good or evil, he continually becomes low-spirited and miserable, and as he grows older he realizes his own impotence. He dies miserably.

The first fifty pages of the book are a masterpiece of description. We are introduced into a small social circle in the country. Every member is rapidly classified and sketched. Suddenly the expected Messiah enters this rather dull assembly and at once takes command. Everything pales before his sparkling eloquence. Only an obstinate old sceptic stands up to him and declaims on the everlasting struggle of matter-of-fact life against enthusiastic idealism. Gradually the visions are dissipated; the more practical minds withdraw their confidence in this visionary, the

younger disciples pull up in time. All these humble people henceforth lead exemplary but ordinary lives, happy with their good incomes, good wives and good friends, while the prodigal, notwithstanding his superior intellectual gifts, falls lower and lower. The prosaic has triumphed over the ideal. . . . At the outset the author gives them a useful lesson by putting his finger on one of the greatest faults of the Russian spirit. He tells them that mere aspirations are insufficient, that the practical sense must be added, and application and self-control learnt.

By this book, *Rudin*—a moral and philosophic study—the author successfully stirred up thought and interested the mind. People wondered whether he would be equally capable of developing the higher sentiments and stir up the emotions of the heart. The answer came in his *Nest of the Landlords*. I believe this to be his best achievement, though not faultless. The movement is not so brisk as in the previous one, and by laying much stress on the genealogies of the characters, the interest is delayed; but once the story commences, it is handled with consummate art.

The *Nest of the Landlords* is one of those old provincial homes where generation after generation has succeeded each other. We are introduced to a young girl, growing up among such surroundings, who serves as the type of all heroines to be found in all Russian novels. A simple soul, frank, with no brilliant exterior, without any particular gift of the mind, but endowed with a charm of grace and armed with an iron will. This is a quality Turgeneff denies his male heroes, but with which he invariably endows all the young girls of his imagination, with the result that they are often pushed by fate into most extraordinary and extravagant situations. Lizzie is twenty years of age. She remained indifferent to the attentions of a handsome young man favoured by her mother. Tired of resistance, she eventually becomes engaged to him, which fact becomes known to a

distant relation of hers by name Lavretsky, a married man, but a long time since separated from an unworthy wife who consoles herself in fashionable watering-places abroad. There is nothing of the romantic hero about this dull, good-natured, but melancholy and grave old man. All these people are taken from life. A mysterious attraction brings these two closer together. At the moment when the more experienced Lavretsky realizes the true meaning of their mutual feelings, the newspapers tell him of his wife's death. He is now free, and that very evening in the old home garden love declares itself as easily as falls the over-ripe fruit. The scene is delightful, so natural and so out of the common. But their great happiness is short-lived, for the newspaper's announcement is false and the wife suddenly reappears the very next day!

The conflicting feelings raised by the situation can well be imagined. What is more difficult to imagine is the delicate manner in which these two perfectly upright souls are carried through this ordeal by the author. The necessary sacrifices are made with a resolute firmness by the girl and after painful struggles by the man. We are now expecting the inconvenient and despicable wife to disappear, and many a gentle reader hopes the author will make her die. Alas! those who love happy endings most had better close the book. Madam Lavretsky does not die; she continues to live as gaily as ever. Lizzie only knows what existence means by that one avowal of love which came and departed with the starlight of a single short night. She is not rebellious, but brings her broken heart to God and buries herself in a convent.

Some will say that this is a pretty story for young girls after the fashion of Madam Cottier. At first sight it does seem old fashioned. But only after carefully following all the developments treated with a new kind of skill, and noticing the close adherence to the realities, is it possible to realize and admire the author's method for rejuvenating

a very old story in human history. There is not a trace of weak sentimentality in this sad story, no outburst of passion, only the light touch of a chaste and discreet sentiment, well under control, which enlarges and then wrings the heart.

The end of the book contains an epilogue which is and always will remain a model of Russian diction. Eight years have passed, and Lavretsky one spring morning returns to the "Nest," now inhabited by another generation. Children have grown into young men and women with their own interests in life. Almost unrecognized, he appears unexpectedly in the midst of their games. The book opens in the same way, and it looks like a repetition. Lavretsky seats himself on the very bench where long ago for a moment he last held the hand which ever since has been counting beads in a cloister. The young birds of this ancient "nest" are unable to answer the questions of this troublesome, forgotten disturber of their amusements. They have other matters to occupy them, and return to their games. Whilst solitude and sorrow are ravaging his aged heart, the words he hears recall to mind his own dead past, and he sees the renewal of the same joys, the same life—which is ever the law of Nature. It is the return of the original melody towards the end of one of Chopin's sonatas.

Seldom has a particular incident so well served to emphasize the contrast between nature's perpetuity and human decay. Never have I found more carefully chosen comparisons, which so aptly bring home to one the pitiless march of time. The author has made the older characters so dear to us that the rising youth and maidens just beginning life seem hateful. I should have liked to cite entire pages out of this book, but, disconnected, they would lose much by the absence of what leads up to them and makes them so forcible. On reading them one is inclined to apply to Turgeneff himself the words he uses about one of his heroes elsewhere. "He possessed the great secret of that

music which in itself is eloquence. He knew, by striking certain chords in the heart, how to make all others murmuringly respond in gentle accompaniment."

The *Nest of the Landlords* assured the author's world-wide fame. This is a strange world in which the poet, like a conqueror or a woman, can secure the affection of its people by making them suffer and weep. All Russia began to shed tears over his book, and poor Lizzie became the ideal of all young girls. It would be necessary to go back to Paul and Virginia before one could meet with another book which had such an influence over an entire nation. It seemed as if the author himself continued to be haunted by the type of heroine he had created.

In his next book, *At Eventide*, the heroine, Helena, is the same serious-minded girl, with an implacable will, secretive and obstinate, who pursues adventure clandestinely, escapes from all good influences, and goes her own way with a supreme contempt for all obstacles. This time the conditions are changed. The beloved is free, but is objected to by her family. Lizzie, we saw went into a convent against the wishes of her own people. Helena gives herself entirely to her lover and joins him. She does not for a moment believe that she is doing wrong—and moreover redeems any fault by constant devotion during a long life full of trials and difficulties.

In this character study there is one leading thought which appeals to the national temperament. The man is irresolute, the woman is firm. It is she who forces the hand of Providence, and follows only her own sweet will and desires. Everything which to our minds would be considered bold and imprudent, the author's chaste and delicate pen places before us in such a way that one is singularly tempted to view the matter merely as that of a virile soul acquiring freedom. The high-minded and strong girls created by him are capable of anything except to feel afraid, to betray, or to tell a lie.

In the *Nest of the Landlords* Turgeneff has poured out his innermost soul and revealed the "hidden source" augmented by all the restrained tears of his youth, and which had tormented the author until he was able to find relief in this book. He now sets to work on social matters, and during that intellectual scramble which agitated Russia about 1860—on the eve of the emancipation—he wrote his *Fathers and Sons*. It is common knowledge that that book marks an event in the history of thought. The novelist had the rare good fortune of being able to discern a new spirit; to fix it in a type which will never be forgotten, and, what is rarer still, to have had the felicity of finding a name, hitherto sought for in vain, wherewith to baptize that new state of mind. It was indeed the good fortune of Colombus doubled by that of Amerigo Vespucci.

"Who is this Bazaroff? asks one of the parents, one of those grand old Fathers of a bygone generation.

"Do you really want to know? He is a Nihilist," replies his son, friend and disciple of that aforesaid terrible medical student.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean a Nihilist."

"Nihilist?" repeats the old man. "Oh! yes: that comes from the Latin *nihil*—with us 'nichevo,' nothing, as far as I can judge. That just means a man who admits nothing."

"Say rather respects nothing," adds another old man.

"One who examines everything from a critical point of view," answered the young man.

"That's the same thing."

"No, it is not the same thing. The Nihilist is the man who bows to no authority, who admits of no principle as an article of faith, with whatever respect such principle may be enshrouded."

The dear old Kirsanoff, an academician of 1820, could go no further back than the Latin. But for a better under-

standing we shall go further back still, to the very root of the word and the philosophic meaning underlying it, viz. to the old Aryan stock of which the Slavs are a main branch. Nihilism is the Nirvana of the Hindu, the self-abnegation of discouraged primitive man before the force of Matter and the Occult moral world; and the Nirvana necessarily engenders the furious reaction of the vanquished, the blind effort for the destruction of the Universe that crushes and disconcerts him. But I am not minded to revert to what I have already noticed, nor to carry this matter further. Moreover, whatever Nihilism may be, such as it has been our misfortune to know it in France is in Turgeneff's famous work only as yet in embryo.

I would only wish to draw the reader's attention to another saying used by the author as being astonishingly just and perhaps more prolific of meaning than the former word which was to have such a brilliant future. As in all his works, here is a young girl who has as usual been given the fine part of perception and reason. One day, during a discussion with one of Bazaroff's friends—a simple lad who thought himself a Nihilist on the strength of having learnt to repeat a few of his teacher's aphorisms—she suddenly said to him—

"Look here, your Bazaroff is not my sort, and he is none of yours either."

"Why is that?"

"Well, what shall I say? . . . He is a savage brute, and you and I, we are tamed animals."

This comparison enables us to perceive, more than would a volume of discussion, the shade of distinction which differentiates Russian Nihilism from the similar mental maladies from which humanity has suffered since the days of Solomon up to our times. This Bazaroff, a cynical peasant's son, embittered, who sputters brief sentences in a language at times vulgar, at other times scientific, who attacks everything, is otherwise an honourable fellow

incapable of a vile action. He represses his better instincts out of mere pride, but is at heart a savage, too rapidly educated, who having stolen our weapons uses them against us. Turgeneff's hero has many points in common with Fenimore Cooper's Red Indian, but a redskin fuddled with the doctrines of Hegel and Buchner, instead of with "fire water," and who stalks the world with a lancet instead of rushing about with a tomahawk.

When the disciples of Bazaroff take to a "propaganda by deeds" they appear to be like our Western revolutionaries, but a closer inspection will indicate the shade of difference between the brute tamed and the brute untamed. Most of our revolutionaries are but as infuriated dogs; the Russian Nihilist is a wolf, and we know to-day that the enraged wolf is the more dangerous of the two.

See how he meets the tests in the two great crucial moments of life, in which the novelist depicts him—in love and at death. A beautiful woman, coquette, bored, tempted by her strange conquest, a bit of a she-wolf herself —as are many of Turgeneff's heroines—has decided to amuse herself with this wild beast. He is pierced to the heart, he, the ironic detractor of the ideal—he who, when first repressing his admiration, can only utter the cry of a sawbones: "A fine body, by Jove! What a splendid thing for the dissecting table!" . . . Bazaroff is indignant with himself at the thought, which is out of harmony with either of his two methods—scientific explanation or negation. Then, overcome by painful feelings, he proceeds like a wolf; lurking after his victim, he proudly moves off, returns nearer, bristles up, silent and ardent. He thus loses many a favourable opportunity which others would have successfully seized. Suddenly and at the wrong moment he throws himself with one bestial bound on his prey. The coquette escapes him and he returns abashed, and feeding on his mortified pride, roams about in silent solitude.

And what a death is Bazaroff's! He gets blood-poisoning

whilst dissecting the corpse of a typhoid case. He knows himself to be at death's door. In mental agony, dumb and disdainful, we once more note the instinct of the savage brute carrying his bullet into the silent thicket. It is the "Death of the Wolf" over again where Vigny so ably describes that stoic desolation.

> "Sighs, cries and prayer are for the coward's heart:
> With energy perform thy long and heavy task,
> Then—as I do—suffer, and silently depart."[22]

The Nihilist, even if re-incarnated as a Stoic, performs no task before dying. What use is there in working for nothing?

The writer put all his art into the construction of this deplorable character, yet there was nothing repulsive about him. The omission of a single feature describing this feeling of hatred for everything we esteem—this want of *human* feeling—would be intolerable. In a tamed animal it is but perverseness, or forgetfulness of lessons learnt, in an untamed brute it is but pure instinct, its "natural cussedness," and Turgeneff does well to spare us our indignation towards this victim of fate, whose brain has become congested through being too suddenly crammed with learning.

The author's extreme delicacy on the other hand finds full play when dealing with the "Fathers," those men of the old school standing like rocks, nervously watching a new kind of flood surging against them, and which they with much tenderness attempt to restrain. Turgeneff has never before used his power of minute description to such advantage. I should like to quote a few examples, but it is difficult, for he disdains flashes of rhetoric or rhapsodies used only for effect; moreover, details find their value only in their subtle connection with the whole. I will, however, choose two short episodes which seem most suitable examples of personal description, each in its own way. The first is one of everyday life at that time. A high functionary and a future statesman from St. Peters-

burg makes his tour of inspection in the author's native country. He is thus described.

"Mathew Ilich was a young man of promise, barely forty. The portals of the high offices of State stood open to receive him. On each side of his ample breast he wore a decoration. One of these certainly was a foreign one of the commoner kind. Like the Governor he had come to inspect he passed as a Progressive, and though already one of the big-wigs he did not in the least resemble the majority of big-wigs. He had a very high opinion of himself and his vanity was unbounded, but he affected a simplicity of manner. He looked down on one encouragingly, and was a patient listener. His laugh was so good-natured that at first sight he might well be taken as a real 'good fellow.' Nevertheless, on great occasions he was, as they say, well able 'to throw dust into one's eyes.' He then used to say 'More energy is desirable,' adding in French 'Zeal is the first attribute of a statesman.' For all that he was readily fooled by the officials, every one of whom could easily lead him by the nose.

"Mathew Ilich spoke with admiration of Monsieur de Guizot, and took pains to let everybody know that he was against all 'red-tape,' procrastination and circumlocution, and that he stood for every kind of improvement in social matters, and so forth. He knew all these set phrases by heart. He even claimed acquaintance with the literature of the day, but with a majestic air of stand-offishness. With him it was the case of the grown-up man who, meeting one day a procession of street urchins, stops to watch a while and then joins them. At bottom Mathew Ilich differed but slightly from the statesmen of Alexander I's day, who, before attending the drawing-rooms of Madame Swechin, took the precaution of reading a page or two out of Condillac. The difference was only in the outward appearances, which in his case were quite up to date. He was an adroit and cunning courtier—no more. Public affairs were

of no interest to him, and concerning them he held no opinions of his own, but he managed his private affairs admirably, and in them he allowed no interference. And is that not the main thing? "

The second example is that concerning Princess ——, a lady of refinement and of good position. " Her reputation was that of a flighty flirt, given up entirely to all kinds of pleasures, dancing till ready to drop, laughing and frolicking with all the young men she received every evening before dinner in a half-lit drawing-room. The night she spent in prayers and tears, moving about her room wringing her hands until the small hours, looking out for a place to rest in; or she would remain seated, pale and chilled, bending over her psalter. Daylight arrived, she became once more transformed into the woman of the world, went out, chatted, smiled and literally threw herself into everything which could give her a moment's distraction. . . . But even when she seemed to let herself go there was yet something mysterious and unapproachable about her which nobody could quite make out. God only knew the secret things hidden in that heart! It seemed as if she stood in the presence of some mysterious Power, unknown to herself, which played with her as it willed, and whose caprices her weaker spirit could not gainsay. Her whole life was a series of contradictions. The only letters which could have justified a husband's suspicions were written to an almost entire stranger, and in them love appeared a doleful subject. She never laughed or joked with the man of her choice. She listened to him in a kind of stupor, which at times changed suddenly into a frigid look of terror, giving her features a stiff, savage expression. On such occasions she shut herself up in her apartment, where her maid, ear to the keyhole, heard her silently sobbing her heart out."

Whilst Turgeneff was employed on his larger works he also wrote some of his simple stories which made the fortune

of his *Tales of a Hunter*. These laborious years also produced those fascinating novels *Mumu*, *Accalmie*, *The Three Meetings*, *First Love*, and twenty others, all light sketches hanging between the masterpieces on the walls of the picture gallery—often made out of nothing, but just a provincial custom, or a fleeting memory, or an introspection. This refined artist excelled in such half-tones and subdued touches requiring no need of definite expression to present an instant's sorrow or a passing heart throb. I know of nothing better than the sixty pages of *Assia*.[1] It is a memory of student life in Germany, of a tender passion, hardly realized. Assia is a young Russian girl, shy, fanciful, quick as a bird. It is impossible to forget the picture after having read the description of this girl. A student meets her, and loves unconsciously. He hesitates to take her seriously, and the child, dreadfully hurt, disappears. The man who only understood her after she had vanished, deplores his loss.

I select a few lines out of this poem in prose at random, but with special reference to the touching and unconscious sentiment.

The two young people are returning from an evening's walk on the bank of the Rhine.

" I looked at her bathed in the clear sunshine, so sweet and gentle. Everything about us—below our feet, above our heads—was shining bright—the sky, the earth, the water. One would have said that the air itself was saturated with light.

" ' Behold! How beautiful it is! ' I said, involuntarily lowering my voice.

" ' Yes, it is! ' she replied in the same tone, without raising her eyes. ' If we were birds how we would fly and soar! . . . We should drown ourselves in the blue. But . . . we are no birds! '

[1] *Anushka* is the French translation. I cannot see why one of Turgeneff's most delicious characters should have been rebaptized with a servant's vulgar appellation.

"'Wings might be given us!' I said.

"'How so?'

"'Only live and you will see! There are feelings which lift one far above the earth. Fear not. The wings will come.'

"'Have you had any?'

"'How shall I explain it to you? . . . I feel as if up to this moment I had never flown.'

"Assia remained silent and thoughtful. I drew nearer. Suddenly she asked me—

"'Can you waltz?'

"'Yes,' I replied, somewhat puzzled by this question.

"'Well, then, come along. I shall ask my brother to play a tune. We will imagine ourselves having wings and able to fly. . . . Come. . . .'

"It was late when I left her. On recrossing the river, in mid-stream I asked the ferryman to stop rowing and to let us float for a while with the current. The old man rested on his oars and the majestic stream carried us along. I looked round, listened and remembered. Suddenly I had a mysterious feeling in my heart. I lifted my eyes to the heavens, but saw that the sky was not at peace, for pierced with stars it seemed to be restless, palpitating and trembling. I leant over the side, and there also in those dark and chilling depths the stars glistened and trembled. The throb of universal life surrounded me, and I too became more and more agitated. I leant back. The noise of the wind in my ears, the lapping of the water against the boat, jarred on my nerves—the fresh breezes over the water could not calm me—a nightingale on the bank sang its song which thrilled in my veins like a subtle delicious poison. My eyes filled with tears, but not the hysterical tears due to an undefined cause. What I felt was not that confused feeling, often experienced, of boundless aspiration, when the heart expands and vibrates—when it feels as if it could understand everything, love everybody. . . .

No! I thirsted for but one draught! I did not as yet dare give it a name—but happiness, an overpowering happiness, is what I longed for, filling my heart with anguish. . . . The bark floated gently on. The boatman was asleep on his oars. . . ."

IV

Ah! the glorious years that began with that of 1860. The emancipation of the serfs! Turgeneff's life-dream was now an accomplished fact and the beginning of further great reforms. The light of the new era penetrated into every part of the old fusty government machine, and everywhere could be heard the noise of renewed springs setting it in motion. It was a joyous awakening of forces and hopes a long while repressed.

These eventful years in the nation's history marked no less important events in Turgeneff's own private life. He had given his life as a virgin gives herself without reserve even unto death. Owing to an all-powerful love affair abroad he expatriated himself and left Russia, not to return except at rare intervals, and established himself first at Baden-Baden, then amongst us in Paris. Destiny had crowned him with success in all his efforts as a man, a writer, and a patriot. Having publicly assisted at the rebirth of his country, his works translated into every tongue, fame followed him into the West. It might be thought that were he after these many years of silence again to come before the public he would but repeat Simeon's Song of Praise.

But that would indeed show little knowledge of poor human nature and particularly of that poetic soul never able to rest satisfied. Our hearts rejoice if we can nurse a dream all the days of our life from youth upwards and never see it realized with the coming years. What have we to do with accomplished realities?

Turgeneff reappeared on the scene with his *Smoke* in 1868. We see the same talent ripened and with increased flavour, but no longer the same frank and trustful soul of former days. At the very first page the disenchantment manifests itself. Were we dealing with any other man, we should surmise that his gall bladder had burst, but applied to Turgeneff, that would be an exaggeration, for he possessed no gall in his temperament. His mournful pleadings, still possessing the ideal form, express astonishment at the fact that his cherished ideas when put into practice have not made man perfect. His resentment at his own deception sometimes approaches the unjust. The angry pen now shows us blackened characters such as are never to be found in his former works. The Russian society he describes in *Smoke* is of the kind met with abroad—great men and women of uncertain reputation, students and conspirators, not always samples of the best native quality. The scene is set at Baden-Baden, where the author had plenty of opportunities for studying all these at his leisure. From among this curious assembly of " Kursaal Generals," of Picknicking Princesses, braggart Slavophils and revolutionary bagmen, many points are taken from life, but as a whole they appear overdrawn. The faulty conception is enhanced by the author's own belief that these are not exceptional types, but faithful representations of the true Russian society high and low.

Moreover, he has also modified his method. Previously he placed his arguments in battle array and left us the decision. He now puts himself in our place and intrudes his own opinion. The novelist and the dramatist desirous of expounding their ethical views have two methods at their disposal—with or without their personal intervention. Take, for instance, an illustration familiar to everybody. In *Les Miserables* two antagonistic conceptions of duty and virtue are personified in Jean Valjean and Javert. There is room for doubt as to their respective merits.

But the author, with a few words having all the weight of his eloquence, exalts the one and debases the other, thus forcing our judgment. On the other hand, in the *Gendre de M. Poirier* we are shown two different kinds of honour, each upheld by two quite incompatible kinds of society, one led by the Marquis de Presle and the other by his father-in-law. The author here effaces himself. He equally lauds these two characters, their merits and demerits, the strong and the weak parts of their theories. To the very end one is left in doubt as to which side to take. This conflict of ideas is just the charm of that drama. I prefer this latter method as being more in harmony with ordinary life, where truth is seldom clearly seen, and when good and evil are everywhere mingled.

In all his former works Turgeneff adopted this method. In his later works, *Smoke* and *Virgin Soils*, he intrudes himself a good deal. Potugin, a secondary character in *Smoke*, a kind of Olivier de Jalin, is evidently created for the purpose of communicating the author's opinion and to sum up the debate.

With this reservation I agree that Potugin's tirades overflow with merriment and good sense. Representing a " Western," he jeers at his pet aversion, the Slavophils, he ridicules all national efforts and particularly that prevalent mania of asserting that the most ordinary things by coming in contact with the Russian soil acquire a mystic virtue. He finds several clever ways for characterizing this infatuation, as, for instance, when he talks of " Russian leather literature " or when he says " With us two and two make four, but with greater cheek than anywhere else." Having shot his bolt, the writer concocts a love intrigue, wherein he shows himself just as well acquainted with the secrets of the human heart as formerly. Nevertheless, here too he has changed his manner. He used to find pleasure only in virginal emotions, the female sex was always a maiden of loyal heart who carried her head high even when

having to brave the world. In *Fathers and Sons* only once does he give a young widow the part of a flirt, and then only very guardedly. But now in *Smoke* and the *Spring Floods* he shows us all the varieties of cruel love, their tortures, their lies and their unfathomable abominations. The young maiden, however, is still there, held in reserve finally to save the young repentant sinner. But it is only a pale image of former days.

Some may prefer these more tempestuous noises to the sweet harmonies of his earlier novels. It is a matter of taste, and I have no wish to decry the merits of *Smoke*, which will always remain a masterpiece in other ways. I only wish to point out that as the evening closes the poet's limpid soul reflects some heavy clouds and a disturbed sky. Towards the end of the *Spring Floods*, after that marvellous description of the scene where the seducer triumphs—all so true to life both as regards the weakness of man and the diabolical power of woman—there are pages full of rancour, and one cannot help feeling sorry for a writer who is able to feel thus.

In 1877 Turgeneff published his last novel (in the *Messager d'Europe*), a long-winded work entitled *Virgin Soils*. If my memory serves me right, I think it first appeared translated into French in the *Temps*, to feel its way. The original was then published in Russia and circulated without opposition. This alone can give us a good idea of the progress made since the day when Gogol's *Letter* made such a stir in the censor's office. In this work the author walks on hot bricks along a road that formerly led to Siberia. He was seized with the ambition of describing the underground world that was beginning to cause the empire some anxiety. Having been the first to signal it, and having for twenty-five years explored all the currents of thought which emanated from the Russian soil, the same observer wished to finish his self-appointed task by showing us their logical goal. As they disappeared underground it

was incumbent on him to follow and even bravely risk a subterraneous descent into the infernal regions. He was, moreover, spurred to doing this by a rival having in a measure anticipated him, for, as will be seen, *Virgin Soils* is in direct reply to Dostoyevsky's book, *The Possessed.* The attempt was not quite a happy one. Having been out of Russia for fifteen years, Turgeneff was not in the best position to probe the incessant changes in that hidden world, at all times difficult of approach. It is difficult to give correct impressions when distance precludes personal contact, and all information must hence be merely inferred. Our writer had flattered himself that he was able to embody the still nebulous ideas of the Nihilists in his characters. But the true image remained undefined, and he could throw no further light on them.

These are the reasons why *Virgin Soils,* in the first part at least, is of less interest and not so brilliant when compared with his former works. The author introduces us to the conspirators in St. Petersburg. One of these young men has managed to get a post as tutor in the family of a rich official, who takes him to his " nest " in the country. There Nyejdanoff meets a young girl of good family who is embittered by the many humiliations received at the hands of the master and mistress of the house, who treat her merely as a poor relation. She is set ablaze by the new ideas rather than by their apostle. One day both run away and form one of those unfettered unions where as brother and sister they work together strenuously at the great social work in hand. They move " among the people," directed by the provincial members of their society. But the youth does not possess a character strong enough for such a struggle, being physically weak, a dreamer, and a poet who passes the night writing verses. Discouraged by his doubts, he soon finds that all is not well with his soul. He does not like the work which demands the sacrifice of himself, and he does not know how he can be of any use. He does not

worthily love the woman who nobly sacrificed herself for him, and feels that he has fallen in her estimation. Tired of life, too proud to retreat, and sufficiently generous to set the woman free before in a weak moment he makes her his mistress, he kills himself. He had learnt that one of his friends possessing a better balanced mind was secretly in love with Marianne and that she was able to love him in return. Dying, he joins the hands of these two souls gifted with the same courage. The story ends with the description of a violent disturbance, its abortiveness being used as a moral against the folly and puerility of the revolutionary propaganda among the people. This Nyejdanoff, though an unlikely character, is the most striking and life-like in the book. He was taken from life from among the better class of despairing Russian youth. Other revolutionaries also pass before us, shadowy forms, babbling unintelligible "nothings."

The representatives of the higher classes are treated even more harshly than in *Smoke*, being given the same self-sufficiency, made the same objects of ridicule, but without any compensating qualities. Hence they are more like caricatures, and spoil the book by want of balance and by imparting a false impression. On the other hand, the apostles of the "new faith" are encumbered with a halo for their generosity and devotion. The writer's choice was limited to depicting either the mere egoism of daily life on the one hand and the lively faith and fierce self-abnegation on the other. His warm heart incautiously precipitates him to that side in which disinterestedness is most apparent. He gives those common natures who are all of the same coarse mould, a delicacy of feeling which ennobles them, and hides from us, and from himself, their revolting counterparts and their brutal instincts. He had a keener sense of the truth when he gave us the restless Bazaroff of the wolf's countenance fleeing into the woods. I believe Turgeneff was misled by his extreme sensitiveness

when painting the Nihilist's personal character. He was better served by his reason when doing justice to their ideas, and to their puerile declamations and blind hopes.

The best pages are those in which the author practically demonstrates the utter impossibility of a union between the propagandist and the people. Abstract reason breaks to pieces on the thick skulls of the mujiks. Nyejdanoff holds a meeting in a taproom. The peasants compel him to drink. At the second glass of vodka he gets nearly dead drunk and crawls away amid jeers. Another, who incites the villagers to revolt, is handed over bound to the police. At times Turgeneff puts his finger on the weak spot in the revolutionary principle itself. These Nihilists, united by a spirit of recklessness, hope instantaneously to raise an ignorant population to the same intellectual level to which they have themselves attained only after much study, ignoring the fact that time is needed for such a miracle to come about. They expect to overcome that disadvantage by using cabalistic formulas, with the result that they pinch their own fingers in the process. The poet sees all that, and makes the fact quite clear, but as he is a poet, he allows himself to be seduced by the ethical beauty of self-sacrifice apart from its object; and this weakness only makes the sacrifice doubly futile.

This is perhaps the place to touch on a delicate matter I dare not avoid. Certain claims of a political nature and engraved on the author's tombstone have created a good deal of commotion in Russia and nearly caused the national mourning to have been disturbed by bitter recrimination. Already, whilst yet alive, the Moscow press had urged a violent campaign against Turgeneff, in consequence of his *Mémoires d'un nihiliste* in a French newspaper. This was not a piece of imagination, but a true record of one of his compatriots escaped from Russian prisons. As he himself says, in the introduction, the pamphlet had the recommendation of being stamped with the mark of truthfulness, and of

being devoid of recrimination. These Memoirs are written in that same plaintive and impersonal style which I have before noted as being peculiarly a psychological attribute of the Russian, who is so occupied in studying the emotions of his own soul whilst undergoing affliction that he forgets to incriminate the authors of these sufferings. This tract gives every minute detail in the most realistic manner, and such a clear view of the soul passing through the different stages of the feelings leading to despair that it reminds one of Dostoyevsky. But these Memoirs did not find favour in Russia. The indulgent way in which he wrote about the Nihilists caused Turgeneff to be accused of being an accomplice of the enemies of the State.

Moreover, the revolutionary party claimed this man as its own, and pointed to his financial support of a well-known seditious paper in proof. This was all wrong. Turgeneff had indeed a ready hand, as also a ready heart, to give indiscriminately to all in difficulties. It was sufficient that he was a Russian, to find his door and his purse open and kind words on his lips. But if he did help such men, it is certain that it was not because of their politics. How was it possible for him, a civilized and refined "Western" with the noblest thoughts, to mix himself up with wild and futile conspiracies! His ideas were always floating about in a vaporous Liberalism, brought with him from Germany when twenty years of age, and he was more inclined to indulge in dreams than to take any definite action. One has but to read *Virgin Soils* to learn the limitations Turgeneff placed on his own views, and to which he always adhered.

We find there a certain Solomin, a young manager of a factory who holds moderate views, and is obviously intended to represent those held by the author. Solomin has been led astray by the propagandists, but his good sense at last showed him the futility of their efforts. If he shows no liking for the officials who administer the

Russian soil, neither does he show any confidence in the children who are silently undermining it. Little by little he separates from the latter, and escaping from a final madcap adventure by the skin of his teeth, he goes to the Ural Mountains and starts a prosperous business on a co-operative basis.

Let us not be indiscreet and press Turgeneff as to what his basic views really are. The author intended that the Socialist of his making should be rational and interesting unto the end; he places him in the midst of the existing state of affairs and lets him be his own interpreter. The Russian reader asks for nothing more, and everybody else is satisfied.

But I am taking a long time over the political views of a poet. The man who was so ingenuous in the noblest sense of the word, with regard to the most ordinary things of life, might well have been the same in politics. Those who would still further discuss the colour of his flag run the risk of themselves being accused of being simpletons. One must not feel astonished nor disquieted because of delicate lyres sounding false when their chords are struck by the coarse rough hands of politics. One can but close one's ears and take the safe course lying between Plato's Republic, which banished poets, and that of 1848, which offered them Presidencies.

About this time Turgeneff wrote a few more novels, five or six, one of which, *King Lear of the Steppe*, reminds me, by its intenseness and vivacity, of the best bits out of the *Hunter's Tales*. I cannot further delay by criticizing these two books, as it is high time to return to a general examination of his monumental work as a whole.

V

Turgeneff understood Russian society and summed it up in several types, always presented to us in his writings. Let us consider them carefully. In his later works he reverts to these familiar types without modifying them. And we must take it for granted that they are faithful representations, at least from their own point of view. First we come to the peasant, gentle, resigned, asleep, as touching in his misery as a child who knows not why he suffers, but also malicious and cunning when not brutalized by drink, which frequently leads him to indulge in frenzies of passion. Above him are intelligent middle classes and the small provincial landlords. Both these comprise two generations. One is the grand old squire, a good fellow, ignorant, holding traditions of respectability and vulgar vice, from long habit hard on the serfs, and himself servile, but in every other respect of good repute.

Quite different is it as regards the younger generation. Its "young man" has been rushed into Nihilism in a fit of aberration brought on by a too rapid education. He is frequently well instructed, but is of a melancholy turn of mind, rich in ideas but poor in action, always "about to begin to study," tormented by the vague generous ideal of possessing "goods in common." Such is the type chosen by the Russian novelist. We have seen his beginning in Gogol's brain; we shall see him fully developed in Tolstoy's writings.

The hero, beloved of the young Russian girl, not less than by the romantic married woman, is not the brilliantly uniformed officer, or an artist, or a magnificent and noble landowner, but nearly always the middle-class "Hamlet," honourable, cultivated and of well-balanced intelligence, but of feeble will, invariably returning to Russia from abroad filled with scientific theories for the amelioration

of the soil and peasant, and burning to apply these acquired theories in "his own possessions." That is the main point. It is essential to the novel that the person wishing to obtain the sympathy of the reader must return to "his own possessions" to "ameliorate the soil" and the "lot of the peasant." The Russian divines that there, and there only, lies the future, the secret of power. But on his own confession he does not know how to set about it.

To pass on to the women of the same class. There is nothing special to remark about the mothers. It is Turgeneff's quaint and fixed habit, due possibly to an old heartache, to make—without a single exception—all the mothers in his novels bad and grotesque. The treasury of his poesy is reserved for the young girl. To him the cornerstone of society is this same young country girl, possessing a liberal education, imparted amongst modern surroundings, preferably frank and open, loving, slightly romantic, less intelligent than men but more decided. Every novel shows us a woman's firm will guiding the irresolute man. Such in broad outline, is the world depicted by the writer. At all times the colouring is so true to nature that the reader in closing the book exclaims, "Had these people been actually alive they could not have spoken and acted otherwise." A judgment that will always be the highest mark of approval for any work of fiction.

There still remain the highest classes to complete the picture. Turgeneff in his later works only refers to them very briefly, and always in sombre hues. His respect for that class was not high, and his mind was prejudiced. The moment good fortune brings his aforesaid perfect young girl into the higher social regions she becomes a frivolous woman, animated by a perverted frolicsome spirit. The man who is fortunate enough to hold "high estate" and has to occupy himself with public affairs has

swagger and folly added to his natural irresolution. There are no doubt some grounds for even these rapid and exclusive judgments, but to enable us to form a reasoned opinion it will be advisable to wait till we hear Leo Tolstoy. He retains the type adopted by his forerunner for the lower and middle classes almost unchanged, but will be seen to dig deeper into the innermost and complex soul of the statesman, the courtier, and the great ladies. He completes the edifice of which Turgeneff has laid the first courses and neglected to finish.

Our novelist does not give us the complicated intrigue and the extraordinary adventures to which the old French novelist was so partial. His is no magic lantern; he shows real life. Facts in themselves interest him little. He looks at them only through the human soul and in their effect on the personality. It is his delight to study character and sentiment as simply as possible, as seen in real daily life. But, and this is his secret, he sees the reality with such a strong personal sympathy that his portraits are never prosaic and always remain true to nature. Of Nyejdanoff, in *Virgin Soils*, he writes, "He is a romantic realist." We can but apply this epithet to himself.

In truth I know of no one among his rivals who has such good taste, such tenderness, such a charm of a peculiar palpitating grace, so equally distributed in every page, like morning dewdrops on every leaf. The following sentence, taken out of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, might apply to him—

"Words came to my lips as tears to the eyes from a full heart unable to restrain them." No one had greater sentiment, and at the same time a greater hatred of sentimentalism. No one had such a power of depicting a whole situation, even the most painful heart-burnings, in as few words.

This gift stands out as a unique phenomenon in Russian

literature, ever bathed in tears. He was, indeed, qualified to rally his fellow scribes who "having stated that the object of the hen is to lay eggs, take twenty pages to unfold this fundamental truth and then without success." The smallest piece of work given us by Turgeneff indicates his frantic efforts at condensation, so well understood by the classic authors.

Such qualities, enhanced by the magic style of his language, always precise and at times magnificent, assure Turgeneff a high place in universal contemporaneous literature.

Taine will no doubt permit me to cite an opinion which borrows great weight from the authority of his name. I have often heard him say that he thought Turgeneff to have been one of the most perfect writers the world ever held since those of Greece. The cold English critic, averse to exaggeration, gives him the first rank.[1] I feel inclined to endorse this verdict each time I peruse this writer's books, but I hesitate when I remember the mighty Tolstoy, who enchains my admiration and confuses my judgment.

Moreover, in cases of precedence in literature, it is advisable to leave the last word to the future.

Subsequently to *Virgin Soils* we see the repose of ebb tide commencing. His talent remained unimpaired, his intelligence kept its vigour and nicety, but the mind seemed to float about more as if in search of a definite direction, so often the case with others in their earliest days. There were many reasons for this despondency. His long retirement amongst us (France) brought him many advantages, but also some inconveniences. At first the study of our masters, the counsels of Mérimée, were invaluable, and it is perhaps to them he owed his intellectual training, and acquired the clearness and precision so rarely

[1] Europe has been unanimous in according Turgeneff the first rank in contemporary literature.—*The Athenæum*, Sept. 8, 1883.

found among his compatriots. Later he became enthusiastic about Flaubert. In the complete edition of his works I come across excellent translations of *Hérodiade* and of the *Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*. Finally, next to the masters of Realism, he became attached to their inferior successors. He unconsciously considered himself as belonging to their school, listening to their doctrines, and made every effort for reconciling them with his former ideals.

But he also felt that he was getting further and further away from the fundamental source of all his ideas, centred in his own country. In Russia he was often reproached for going so far away from home, and some accused him of being a deserter. The drift of his later novels, moreover, had raised sincere recriminations, as also self-interested calumnies. When he returned to St. Petersburg or Moscow, as he occasionally did, the young received him with manifestations of delight, but others showed him marked coldness. He realized that a portion of his public had escaped him, to follow other idols. Even when being respectfully saluted as an elder, this "Parisian in spirit and of tongue" often whispered to himself, "I am looked upon as an old *bonze*." [1] Ah! how quickly one becomes an old *bonze* in the field of literature!

When he was in Russia for the last time, attending the festivities in honour of Pushkin, the students of Moscow unharnessed his horses. But I remember how one day at St. Petersburg, on returning from paying his respects to a high personage, Ivan Sergyevich (Turgeneff) told us quite pleasantly, though with a touch of bitterness: "He called me Ivan Nikolayevich." This oversight would not be of much consequence with us, who are happily relieved from knowing the Christian name of everybody's father, but in Russia, and to a national celebrity, the error was a slight—it was a measure of the growth of oblivion!

[1] An old Buddhist priest.—(Tr.)

At this time it was also my good fortune to pass an evening in the company of Turgeneff and Skobeleff. The young General, with his habitual warmth of eloquence, was telling us his aspirations and his many thoughts. The old penman listened in silence, looking at him with his pensive eyes as if taking in every effect. It was easy to see that the model was posing to the artist, and that he in turn was studying every line for reproduction in one of his works. But the Angel of Death was already hovering at the door, and forbade the new novel its hero, and the poet the pleasure of its creation.

On a spring morning in 1883, the last time I was honoured by Turgeneff with an interview, when reminding ourselves of that incident, he said, "I am going to join him." Looking at the emaciated body, undermined by cruel sufferings, lying on his bed, one could not help feeling that he was speaking the truth. All his vitality was centred in that superb brain underneath a mass of snow-white hair, dishevelled by the proud toss of the head, like that of a wounded lion. His eyes rested on one of Rousseau's paintings, which, between ourselves, he admired because Rousseau, like himself, had realized the forces of the soul and of the soil. The subject was an old oak, the victim of many a hard winter, throwing out its few remaining russet leaves to the December blast. Between that subject and the hoary old man, whom it consoled, there existed a brotherly tie of affection for the lesson it taught of being resigned to the laws of nature common to both.

Already overcome by that rare and terrible disease—cancer of the spinal cord—Turgeneff published yet three more novels, *The Song of Love Triumphant*, a brilliant fantasy in the style of Boccaccio, a bit of work as delicately chiselled as a Florentine jewel; *Clara Millich*, a story no doubt inspired by a drama recently the rage in Paris; in which the author tells of the self-destruction of a young actress, and purposes to instruct us on the causes that

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TURGENEFF

make the epidemic of suicides among the Russian youth attain such frightful proportions. In the third, *Despair*, Turgeneff strives to condense in a few pages the national melancholy, which he has studied and reproduced in all his writings, exposing the unconscious fatalism which governs certain Slavonic minds, giving them a family likeness to the victims of the ancient *fatum* of Æschylus and Sophocles.

It is indeed a sad irony of fate that this romancer's last production should have been entitled *Despair*. In it he said his last word on that Russian mind he had ransacked for forty years. After that he remained silent. Nevertheless the artist survived the man. During his last hours, saturated with opium and morphia, he told his friends of the strange dreams which haunted him, and he expressed regret at not being able to place them on record. "It would have been curious reading," he said. He had already written something of the kind before in one of his later works, *Poems in Prose*, short symphonies of words harping either on some single thought floating about in the old man's mind, or on some sad and fanciful vision such as seizes the soul when struggling to escape and fly away.

A few days before closing his eyes, he took up his pen once more and wrote a touching valedictory letter to his friend, Leo Tolstoy. In this, Turgeneff, with the force of a last will and testament, bequeathed to his rival and heir the care and honour of Russian literature. These are the last lines of that letter—

"Beloved Leo Nikolayevich, I have not written to you for a long time; I have been, and am, on my deathbed. I cannot recover, and it is no use thinking about it. I write particularly to tell you how happy I have been at being a contemporary of yours, and to express my last, earnest request. My friend, return to literary work. That gift has come to you from whence everything comes to us. Oh! how happy I should be if I could think that

you would listen to my prayer. . . . My friend, great writer of our Russian soil, give ear unto my prayer ! Write me, if this paper reaches you. I press you once more to my heart, you and all yours. . . . I cannot any more . . . I am weary ! . . ."

Let us hope that this prayer will be answered by the only writer worthy to take up the pen fallen from those gallant hands ! Like a mortally wounded captain, Turgeneff had bequeathed his power over men's minds to another captain. There was nothing more to keep him back, and he went elsewhere to dream other dreams more restful, more beautiful.

Those he dreamt here below were painful and sad. We have them all contained in a few volumes as an epitome of a long, energetic human life. A literary work is a life. And as in every existence there are days one would like to have effaced, there are also in every book some pages that ought to be destroyed. Turgeneff has allowed a few such to escape him, but on the whole his legacy is wholesome and sane. Let us take leave of this man by asserting once more what is to his credit—that all his books are animated by a noble spirit, which elates and warms the heart. Despite contending theories, that alone is of importance, that alone is honourable, whoever it is who wields the pen.

It is a little thing, and yet it is much, for that gentle influence wafted from the dead will for ever nourish many thousand souls. Turgeneff has disappeared as does the peasant in his Orel home who in the autumn goes to sow his seed. The furrows are long and the " black soil " stretches far out into infinity. The man labours on it, ages, and disappears into the evening mists, jaded and tired, to rest in the valley down below. If he is worn out, or if sickness lays him low in the winter-time, he will be given a place beneath the sod and be forgotten ! What does it matter ? Vanish, poor man of

sorrows, whose destiny was but to break up the naked soil. The seed remains and lives. At the next rise of summer sun the grain will sprout, ripen, form a sea of gold on erstwhile barren steppe, and then disperse to the multitudes the wholesome bread of energy and courage.

CHAPTER V

THE RELIGION OF SUFFERING—DOSTOYEVSKY

HERE comes the Scythian, the true Scythian, who is going to revolutionize all our intellectual habits! We accompany him into the very heart of Moscow, into that monstrous cathedral of Saint Basil, shaped and painted like a Chinese pagoda, built by Tartar architects and yet harbouring the Christian's God!

Turgeneff and Dostoyevsky, though at school together and embarking together in the same intellectual movement, and though making their *début* the same year, yet stand in violent contrast to each other. The one thing they had in common was human sympathy, that distinctive mark of the men of "The 'Forties." In Dostoyevsky this feeling became exalted into a despairing compassion for the poor, and this made him the special teacher of this class which believed in him.

Invisible bonds exist between all forms of art born in the same hour. The desire which led all these Russian writers to study the realities of life, and the influences which, at the same moment, induced the great landscape painters of France to study nature, seem to have sprung from the same source. Corot, Rousseau, Millet, illustrate a common tendency, combined with the personal differences which existed in and characterized their respective talents. The preference given to either of these painters will indicate the preference to be given to either of those writers. I do not wish to force the comparison, but it is yet the only means

for rapidly putting one's mind at ease in regard to the unknown.

Corot stands for Turgeneff's grace and poesy; Rousseau for Tolstoy's simple grandeur, and Millet for Dostoyevsky's tragic bitterness.

His novels are now translated in France, but what astonishes me is that they are read everywhere with pleasure. It puts me at my ease when writing about them.

I should not have been believed if I had tried to describe this strange figure before the resemblance could have been verified by the reading of his novels. But these would be difficult to understand unless one knew the life of the writer who created them—I was going to say experienced them. Never mind—the former word indicates the latter.

In commenting on the labours and life of this man I invite the reader to accompany me on a journey, always sad, often frightful, at times ominous. Those who feel a repugnance on entering hospitals, courts of justice, prisons, and who are afraid to pass through a cemetery at night, had best keep away. I should be a disloyal travelling companion if I tried to enliven a journey which destiny and character had fated to make continuously sad. I am confident that some will follow me, even if the task is heavy; they are of those who believe that the French spirit is burdened with the hereditary duty of knowing all that there is to be known in the world, and of continuing to have the honour of leading the world. And the Russia of the last twenty years will remain an inexplicable enigma if one ignores the books which have made the deepest impression and created the greatest disturbance in the country during that time. Let us examine the works,[1] which have been of such consequence, but first the most dramatic one of all, the life of the man who conceived them.

[1] *Complete Works*, 14 vols. Edited by Brothers Panteleyeff. St. Petersburg, 1883.

I

He was born in 1821 in a hospital at Moscow. Implacable Fate decreed that his eyes should first open on scenes with which they would always be familiar, and on forms exasperated by the greatest misfortunes. His father, a retired military doctor, was attached to that establishment. His family belonged to that class of the " nobility " which furnish the vast army of petty officials, and like nearly all of them, he had a small property and a few serfs, in the province of Tula. The boy was often taken there, and these first impressions of the countryside will from time to time appear recorded in his works, but not often, and always curtailed. Contrary to most Russian writers, who as a rule are fond of the country and invariably return to scenes connected with the localities in which they grew up, Dostoyevsky only refers to them casually. Psychologically this is no loss, for to his human soul the suburbs of great towns and their miserable streets are the " green fields " of his choice. When recalling these days of childhood, the time when particular impressions are first made, it is not the memories of peaceful woods and open skies that will influence the writer's imagination, but the garden of the poor-house, the uniformed patients in their brown coats and white caps, the mild games played by the " humbled " and the " outraged."

The doctor was in bad circumstances and had many children. After the two eldest, Michael and Feodor, had spent some time at a school in Moscow, the father obtained a nomination for them to the College of Military Engineers at St. Petersburg. These two brothers, further united by the same love of literature, were always the best of friends. They supported each other in all the great crises of their lives. The letter written to Michael finds the best place in the volume of *Correspondence* which tells

all about the private life of Feodor. Both boys found themselves very much out of place in this technical college, which for them took the place of a university. Dostoyevsky had no classical education. It would have given him the polish and sedateness acquired by an early acquaintance with literature. He made up for it, whether for good or evil, by devouring Pushkin and Gogol and the French novels, Balzac, Eugène Sue, and George Sand, all which seem to have had great ascendency over his imagination. But Gogol was his favourite master. In *Dead Souls* he found the revelation regarding the poor wretches, to whom he was naturally attracted. Dostoyevsky left college in 1843 with the rank of sub-lieutenant, but did not wear his epaulettes more than a year, when he retired to give himself up exclusively to literature, as a profession.

From that day commenced, to last forty years, that ferocious duel between the writer and misery. The father was dead, and the small patrimony, divided amongst so many, soon vanished. The young Feodor undertook translation work and toyed with journalism. During those forty years, his private correspondence, much resembling Balzac's, is but one long cry of anguish, a constant recapitulation of his indebtedness, bewailing his "cab-horse" work, hired in advance by his publishers. The only daily bread he was certain of was that of the convict prison—should he get there. Thoroughly hardened against all physical privation, Dostoyevsky was most sensitive in other ways. Pride, which was his chief characteristic, suffered terribly at the slightest occasion which revealed his poverty. One sees this festering sore in his letters, in the heroes of his romances, who are visible embodiments of his soul—all are ever tormented by feelings of shyness and distrust. Thus already an invalid, with nerves badly shaken, he was subject to hallucinations. He thought himself the victim of every kind of disease. Often before going to sleep he placed a note upon his desk to this effect—"It

is possible that I may fall into a lethargic sleep to-night; therefore care must be taken not to have me buried before a certain number of days. . . ."

What was certainly not an hallucination was his terribly painful illness—epilepsy—the first symptoms of which now appeared, though it has been asserted that it came to him later in Siberia. But a friend of his assured me that at this time Dostoyevsky often used to fall down in the street, foaming at the mouth. Yes, we may be certain that from that time up to his death he was but a frail bundle of excited nerves, with a woman's soul in a Russian peasant's body; self-centred, shy, full of hallucinations, yet possessing a heart readily overflowing with floods of compassion for the submerged.

Hard work alone pleased and consoled him. In his correspondence he describes the outlines of his forthcoming novels with outbursts of childish delight. Later he recalls these first experiences by placing them in the mouth of a character (drawn from himself), an author who figures in *Humbled and Outraged*. He writes—

"If I have ever been happy it was certainly not in the first moments when intoxicated with success, but it was when I had not as yet shown my manuscript to any one, during those long nights passed in happy dreams filled with enthusiastic hope, with my whole soul in my work; when I lived alone with my vision, with the people created by myself, whom I loved as my own kith and kin, people who seemed to have a real existence, sharing their joys and sorrows, and actually shedding tears for the misfortunes which befell the hero of my own creation."

This sentiment shows up strikingly in his first book, *Poor Folk*, which contains the germ of all his others to follow. Dostoyevsky was twenty-one when he wrote it. Towards the end of his life, in his *Notebook of a Scribe*, he gave us an account of the fine history of its first appearance. The poor young engineer did not know a soul in the literary

world and did not know what to do with his manuscript. One of his comrades—Grigorovich by name, who holds an honoured place in literature, and who confirms the truth of this anecdote—took the manuscript to Nekrasoff, the poet of the "disinherited." At three o'clock in the morning Dostoyevsky heard some one knocking at his door. It was Grigorovich, who had returned, bringing Nekrasoff with him. The poet threw himself into the arms of the unknown author with signs of the deepest emotion. He had spent all night reading the novel, and had been completely upset. Nekrasoff also belonged to that distrustful and shy class of beings to which nearly every Russian writer at this time belonged. These naturally closed hearts, brought into sudden contact by an irresistible impulse, opened out to each other at the first shock and with the generous warmth of youth. Dawn found these three ardent spirits still in excited converse and henceforth inseparably bound together in a communion of hope and dreams of Art and Poesy.

Directly on leaving his protégé, Nekrasoff went straight to Belinsky, the Russian oracle, the critic whose name alone was sufficient to make the beginner shake in his shoes. "A new Gogol has been born unto us!" shouted the poet as he burst into his friend's room. "Gogols spring up like mushrooms nowadays," returned the critic in his most frigid manner, but took hold of the manuscript as if it had been a piece of poisoned bread. It is of course well known that in every land the great critics take hold of manuscripts in this self-same manner. But the perusal of the manuscript had the same magic effect on Belinsky. When the author, trembling with anxiety, presented himself before the judge, Belinsky excitedly addressed him thus:

"Young man, have you understood all the truth of what you have written? No, with your twenty years you could not understand. It is the revelation of inborn art, a gift from above. Be true to this gift, and you will be a great writer."

A few months later *Poor Folk* appeared in a periodical, and the verdict of the critic was ratified by the whole of Russia.

Belinsky was justified in being astonished. No one would believe that a mind of twenty could have conceived such a simple, yet such a thrilling tragedy. That is the age when one "divines" happiness, that "science" learnt in youth, without aid of master, and loses the moment of its practical application. Also the age for inventing unhappiness, startling and heroic, bringing its own reward by its very majesty and tumult. But the sufferings of decay, drab and dumb, the sufferings of shame, hidden like the plague! How and where had he learnt all this before his time, this miserable genius?

It is a very ordinary story in the form of an interchange of letters between two people. One of them is a clerk in a government office, the worse for years and anxiety, going down the hill of a sad life, struggling against material distress, suffering the torments of humiliation. He just escapes being ridiculous. He is uneducated and simple minded, the butt of his fellow clerks—speaks badly, is of average intellect, while his sole ambition is to be a good copyist. But under this faded and comical exterior there beats a child's heart, so candid, so devoted—I was going to say so saintly dull—with its divine gift for self-sacrifice! This is the favourite type for all Russian observers, as being that which embodies the best qualities of the genius of their people. It is the same type as that used by Turgeneff for Lukerya in *Living Relics;* for Karatayeff in *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. But these are only peasants, whereas the Dyevushkin of *Poor Folk* is many rungs higher up the intellectual and social ladder.

There is, however, one ray of gladsome light in this life, otherwise as gloomy and frozen as any Russian winter night. Opposite the garret window at which he does his copying work there lives, also in poor lodgings, a young

girl. She is a distant relation, buffeted by Fate, she also, and but for the feeble protection of this clerk, would be quite alone in the world. Isolated and stifled on all sides by the brutal pressure of men and things, these two miserable ones support each other in the struggle for life. In this state of mutual affection the man displays a tactful unselfishness, a delicacy all the more pleasing because it clashes with his habitual clumsiness of ideas and actions. It is as a timid flower, born in poor soil, among the brambles, betrayed only by its scent. He undergoes heroic privations to support, even merely to enliven, the existence of his friend. The efforts are well hidden, and would not be guessed but for his clumsiness. To him they appear so natural! Sometimes it is the devotion of a father, or a brother, even of a faithful hound. That at least is how he would in good faith describe them were he to analyse his feelings. And yet, I well know the real name to give that sentiment. But tell him not; for he would die of shame at the mere sound of the word!

The woman's character is sketched in a striking manner. She is far superior to her friend in mind and education, and guides him in matters of intelligence, wherein he is still a novice. She is gentle and frail, with a heart less steady, less resigned. She, on her part, has not entirely renounced life, and is continually protesting against the sacrifices Dyevushkin imposes on himself, and implores him not to be anxious about her. Then a "sigh of poverty" escapes her, if perhaps only a childish whim, when longing for a piece of frippery! As they can only meet at long intervals for fear of giving cause for gossip, a daily correspondence is established between them. Their letters tell us of their past, their sad history, the little incidents of their daily life, their disappointments; the terrors of the girl pursued by vice, ever on the watch, the discouragements of an unemployed in search of bread, pitifully endeavouring to defend the rags of her human dignity, grasped at by

cruel hands. At last the crisis arrives. Dyevushkin loses his one joy! No doubt you think that she is going to be ravished and taken away by a young lover supplanting his brotherly affection in the heart of his protégée! Oh, no! It is far more human, far sadder!

A man—the disturbing element—who in the past had paid her attention, offers her his hand. He is of ripe age, very rich, somewhat suspicious; nevertheless his intentions are honourable. Tired of struggling against fate, possibly persuaded that it will alleviate some of the difficulties connected with her friend, the unfortunate girl accepts. Here the study of character is an achieved truth—perfect! The affianced girl, passing from indigence to luxury, is instantly intoxicated with the new atmosphere. Dresses, jewels, at last! In her ingenuous cruelty she fills her last letters with details regarding these important objects; as was her wont, she charges Dyevushkin, who lately had always done her commissions for her, to go to the milliner and to the jeweller. It might be thought that this is a vile soul, unworthy of the exquisite sentiment which she had inspired! Not for an instant is the reader given this impression, so successful is the writer in keeping to the true note. No, it is but a touch of restrained youth and humanity which at last springs up to the surface of a crushed life. Can we blame her? And then, the cruelty explains itself as being due to the differences of sentiment. Hers is a friendship which will remain loyal, grateful, if a little elastic. How can she understand that to him it is sheer despair!

It is one of the marriage conditions that a journey is to be immediately undertaken to a distant province. Up to the last moment Dyevushkin replies to her letters, giving in full detail an account of the commissions entrusted to him, making every effort to show himself well acquainted with lace and ribbons. It is with difficulty that here

and there a repressed sigh betrays the anguish invading him at the thought of his coming abandonment; but in the last letter the torn heart bursts and the miserable man sees before him the horrible remainder of his days, lonely, void! He no longer knows what he is writing; nevertheless his plaint is made with such shyness that it seems as if he had not quite realized the entire secret of his own sorrow. The drama ends with that moan, prolonged into solitude, behind the train which separates these "Poor Folk."

This first book of his is somewhat drawn out, but the fault is less noticeable here than in his later works. Some of the scenes are most realistic, with tragic vigour. A young woman recounts the death of a student living in the same house, the despair of his father, an unlettered, simple old man who lived in apprehensive admiration of his son's intelligence—"so learned"!

"Anna, daughter of Feodor, our landlady, arranged the funeral. She bought a coffin—quite a plain one—and hired a man with his dust cart. To cover her outlay she possessed herself of his books and all his clothes. The old man quarrelled with her over this with much noise, and seized all the books he could get hold of. He was a dolt without any memory. He ran round and round the coffin in a fussy manner, thinking to make himself useful, rearranging the wreaths placed on the body, or the candles. His mind could not remain fixed long on any one object . . .

"Neither my mother nor Anna, the daughter of Feodor, went to church for absolution. My mother was ill, Anna had quarrelled with the old man and would have nothing more to do with the arrangements. I went alone with him. During the ceremony I was seized with a vague fear, with a presentiment for the future. I could hardly stand on my feet. At last they nailed down the coffin, placed it on the cart and off they went. The carter made his horse trot, the old man ran behind moaning in a loud

voice; his sobs were in gasps, intermingled with hiccoughs due to loss of breath by running; the poor man lost his hat and did not stop to pick it up; rain poured down on his head; the wind got up and changed rain into hail, which stung his face. The old man did not seem to notice the frightful weather and kept on sobbing and running from one side of the cart to the other. The tails of his long, shabby coat flapped in the wind like huge wings. From out of every pocket books kept falling out. In his hands he had a large volume, which he pressed to his bosom with all his might. The passers-by uncovered and crossed themselves. Some turned round and looked at the old man with astonishment. Every moment he lost some books, which rolled in the mud. He stopped to pick them up and then ran all the faster to come up with the cart. At the corner of the street an old beggar woman joined the procession, also running. The cart disappeared round the corner and was lost to view."

I would like to quote other and similar passages, but I hesitate, nor can I find them; and that is the highest praise one can give a novel. The structure is so solid, the material so simple and so well adapted to giving the general impression as a whole that to isolate a passage would be to impair its value. It would be like detaching a single stone from a Greek temple, whose beauty is derived solely from its general outline. This is an innate gift of all Russian writers. The pages of their books silently accumulate like drops of water, slow and sure. Suddenly, before having realized the rising of the tide, one finds oneself standing in a deep lake and gradually submerged by the swelling of a dismal flood.

There is another feature they have in common—in which Turgeneff excelled and where Dostoyevsky possibly even surpassed him—it is the art of being able with one line, one word, to raise infinite memories, innumerable sentiments and ideas. This art is fully exemplified in

Poor Folk. The sentences in those pages do not seem to be written lengthways but down into the depths, and cause subdued vibrations which gradually lose themselves in the unknown. They resemble the narrow keys of an organ whence the sound seems to arise, but which are only the means for acting on the invisible connections with the heart of the instrument—that source of harmony, whence really proceeds the " tempest's thunder." On reaching the last page, we have got to know these two people as if we had lived with them all our lives. The author has not told us the thousandth part of what we ourselves know of them, because of the scientific exactitude of what his mere indications reveal. I apologize to the schools of " precise and exact " study, but the writer is indeed the more powerful because he does not describe everything. We are grateful to him for what he allows us to imagine.

The work is a masterpiece of desolation, deserving as an epigraph the words written by Dyevushkin of one of his companions in misery, on being struck by another blow of misfortune : " His tears were streaming, but not perhaps on account of his last misfortune, but for nothing in particular, in ordinary course, as his eyes were at all times brimful with tears ! "

The work is a masterpiece of tenderness; jutting out of the heart in one steady stream. Dostoyevsky in this work has given us an insight into his inner nature—his morbid sensitiveness, his need of sympathy and affection, his bitter conception of life, his ferocious pride.

As in Dyevushkin's simulated letter, his own letters at this period speak of the intolerable annoyance his " shabby greatcoat " occasioned him.

To enable one to share the surprise felt by Nekrasoff and Belinsky, and to understand the originality of this creation, the moment of its literary conception must be borne in mind. The *Tales of a Hunter* (by Turgeneff) only

appeared five years later. It is quite true that Gogol had supplied the theme in his *Greatcoat*, but Dostoyevsky substituted a suggestive emotion to what his master merely imagined.

He continued to write essays in the same strain, but with less success. His restless talent made him examine other directions—even comedy. A farce of his bears the singular title : *The Wife of another and the Husband under the Bed.* The jesting is coarse and heavy, for good nature was what this author failed in most. He possessed the shrewdness of the philosopher, a niceness of heart, but he knew nothing of the delicacy suited to the " mirth of soul."

Fate now charges itself to thrust him back into his proper course, and that with the rudeness she sometimes displays in her manner of indicating her intentions. We now come to the terrible trial which gives this man a peculiarly tragic position among all writers.

II

We have already shown what kind of spirit animated the bands of students who after 1840 clubbed together to discuss Fourier, Louis Blanc and Proudhon. About the year 1847 these societies opened their doors to journalists and to officers of the Army. They were all united into one general association under the presidency of Petrashevsky, one of the " old boys," the author of the *Dictionary of Foreign Terms*, and an " agitator."

Of the true story of the conspiracy that passes under his name, like all other history of that period, little is known. This much is certain, however, that the members were divided in two parties. One party united itself to its predecessors, the Decembrists of 1825, whose ambitions were limited to the emancipation of the serfs and to a

Liberal constitution. The other party was in advance of its successors, the present Nihilists, and desired nothing less than the complete abolition of existing social conditions, however much hallowed by antiquity.

Dostoyevsky's soul, as far as we know it, seemed predestined to be the victim of the movements now in progress. They appealed to his generous sympathies as well as to his offended and rebellious temperament. Years after he tells us, in the *Notes of a Scribe*, how Belinsky, his literary patron, had corrupted him, drawn him towards socialism, and had attempted to make him an Atheist. Those pages, penned in 1873, are written in a bitter and exaggerated vein, and were in so far a mistake that they were published too late—after death had sealed the lips that might have moved in protest.

The author of *Poor Folks* soon became an assiduous member of the meetings inspired by Petrashevsky. It is beyond doubt that he took his place among the moderates, or to be more correct, the "independent visionaries." The only political matters that interested him were those connected with mysticism and compassion. His incapacity for any active participation made him a mere harmless metaphysician. The specific offences with which he was afterwards charged were: participation in meetings, discussing "the severity of the censorship," the "reading of or listening to" unlawful pamphlets, the "promise" of future contributions to a proposed newspaper. These crimes, at most mere errors of judgment, appear very light, especially if they are placed in the balance against the rigorous punishment which they provoked. The police at that time were so imperfect that for two years they ignored what was going on in these assemblies of "malcontents." Eventually a "false friend" betrayed them. Petrushevsky and his comrades finally committed themselves at a banquet given in honour of Fourier.

On this occasion speeches were made in the style current

at the time, on the destruction of the family tie, of property, of kings, and the gods—but this did not prevent these same people meeting again at other banquets where the teachings of the " Founder of Christianity " would be extolled. Dostoyevsky never joined any of these " love-feasts."

This banquet took place—and it is important to remember this in view of what follows—soon after those days in June which had terrified Europe, and just a year after those similar banquets which had led to the overthrow of a throne.[1]

The Emperor Nicholas was a sensible and humane man. He did violence to himself when he had to refrain from being merciful. He was fully persuaded on religious grounds that God had chosen him for the sole purpose of saving a crumbling world. As sovereign, he was already contemplating the emancipation of the serfs, and it was a strange irony that through misunderstanding it was to be his fate to have to punish severely men, of whom some had only committed the crime of wishing the same beneficent thing he himself had in view. History can only be just by looking into every conscience to verify the motives, and to test the springs, that actuate them.

But the time when these struggles just mentioned took place was not propitious for making explanations, or for arriving at a calm judgment.

On the 23rd of April, 1849, at five in the morning, thirty-four suspects were arrested. The two brothers Dostoyevsky were among them. The prisoners were taken to the Citadel at St. Petersburg and secreted in the casemates of the Ravelin Alexis, a lugubrious place, haunted by sad memories. They remained there eight months, without any other distraction than that afforded

[1] Referring to the days before the advent of Napoleon III.—(Tr.)

by the interrogations of members of the Court of Inquiry. Only towards the end were they allowed some religious books. Later Feodor Dostoyevsky wrote to his brother, who had been promptly released at the time, for want of sufficient incriminating evidence: "For five months I have lived on my own substance, that is to say on my own brain, and on nothing else. . . . Perpetually thinking, and thinking only, and that without a single impression from the outside to renew or sustain the thoughts—it was hard to bear. . . . I felt like being under an exhauster where all the air is pumped out." This vivid simile applies with equal justice to places beyond the glacis of the Russian citadel! Hyppolyte Debout, one of the prisoners, recorded the only consolation they experienced. A young soldier of the garrison, on duty in the passage, had been much affected by the lonely isolation of the prisoners. From time to time he slipped the cover of the peephole to be found in every casemate door, and whispered, saying: "Do you find it very trying? Suffer in patience: Christ also suffered." It was perhaps when listening to the words of this soldier that Dostoyevsky conceived some of his characters, which so well represent the pious resignation of the Russian people.

On the 22nd of December the prisoners were brought out without being informed of the sentence passed on them by the Court-martial in their absence. Their number was now reduced to twenty-one—some having been released. They were conducted into the open space of Semenovsky, where a scaffold had been erected. During the short time they stood together on the platform after having recognized each other and fraternized, Dostoyevsky communicated to one of them—Monbelli by name, who afterwards mentioned the fact—the outline of a novel at which he had worked while in prison. With the thermometer at 16° Fahr., the State criminals were made to undress, and in their shirt sleeves had to listen to the

reading of the judgments, which lasted half an hour. After the clerk of the court had begun to read, Feodor Dostoyevsky said to Duroff, standing beside him, "Is it possible we are going to be executed?" It was evidently the first time such a thought entered his mind. Duroff only answered with a gesture, pointing to a cart filled with things hidden under a tarpaulin, which looked like coffins. The proclamation ended with the words:

". . . are condemned to death and sentenced to be shot." The clerk descended and a priest mounted the scaffold, crucifix in hand, and exhorted the doomed to make their confession. Only one, a man belonging to the shopkeeper class, accepted the invitation. All the others, however, kissed the cross. Petrashevsky and two of the leading conspirators were then tied to the posts. The officer ordered the company facing them to load, and gave the preliminary words of command.

As the soldiers raised their muskets, a white flag was hoisted in front of them. Then only did the twenty-one prisoners learn that the Emperor had revised the sentence of the Military Court, and had commuted the punishment. Country carts were at hand near the scaffold to take them to Siberia. The leaders were unroped, but one of them, Grigorieff, went mad and never recovered.[1]

On the other hand, Dostoyevsky since then often affirmed, with every show of sincerity, that he would certainly have gone mad had he returned to a normal life, if this test of endurance, and others to follow, had been spared him.

During his last year of freedom (before going to prison) the obsession of imaginary maladies, trouble with his

[1] These facts are taken from the biographies mentioned in the preface of the *Correspondence*, by Mr. Oreste Miller, and compared with the records left by all the survivors of this epoch.

nerves, and a " mystic fright," [1] were driving him straight into a state of mental derangement, and we can believe him. He assures us that he was only saved by the sudden change in his manner of life, for it compelled him to brace himself against the misfortunes which had hitherto mastered him. I accept his statement, for the secrets of the soul are unassailable; and it is certain that there is nothing better to cure an imaginary illness than real misfortune. At the same time I am inclined to think that this statement may also have been biassed by a sense of false pride. On a careful perusal of all his subsequent work, passages are constantly met with, in which the effects of the mental shock received during those few awful moments are unmistakably in evidence. There is not a single book in which a similar scene of an execution is not reproduced, either as a definite occurrence, or as a vision, described in a manner which absorbs his whole mind in the psychological study of the individual on the point of death. Note the intenseness of such pages, which make one suspect the existence of the hallucinations of a nightmare harboured in some sad corner of his brain.

The Imperial warrant, less severe on the author than on the others, reduced his sentence to four years' penal servitude; to be followed by service in the ranks of the army, loss of " nobility," and all civil rights.

The prisoners were forthwith placed in the carts and the procession started for Siberia. On arriving at Tobolsk they spent the night for the last time together before being dispersed.

They were put in irons, their heads were shaved, and

[1] " With the coming of the twilight I gradually fell into that state of soul which often seizes me, at night, since I became ill, and which I named ' mystic fright.' It is a painful fearsomeness I am not able to define or to conceive, which is not in the ordinary course of things, but which may come on suddenly, this moment even, to appear and stand up before me, like an inexorable fact, horrible, misshapen . . ."—(*Humbled*, p. 55.)

they were sent to different stations. It was here in the local prison they met the " wives of the Decembrists." The courageous example given by these women is notorious. Though belonging to the highest social circles, they had all forsaken the gay life to follow their husbands into exile. For twenty-five years they haunted the prison doors. On learning that their native country was sending out a new generation of the proscribed, these noble women came to visit them in the prisons. Themselves past-mistresses in suffering and courage, they began with innate motherly instinct to teach the young men—all under thirty years of age—what they were to expect and how to bear up against the disgrace. They did even more; they offered each one of them all they could give, all they possessed—a New Testament. Dostoyevsky accepted one, and during the four years in Siberia it remained under his pillow. He read it himself every night by the dormitory night light, and made others read it also. After the hard day's work, whilst his comrades were recuperating their physical strength for the morrow's toil by sleeping, he drew from this book the more needed nourishment for the thoughtful man, and the moral recuperation necessary to enable him to bear his trials nobly.

Let us try and imagine this man of lofty ideas, with delicate nerves, devouring pride, and naturally timid, with a quick imagination, subjected to coarse treatment. Imagine him among that crowd of vulgar scoundrels, doomed to a monotonous convict life, dragged every morning to hard labour, and, at the least negligence, or the least whim of the keeper, threatened to be put under the lash ! He was admitted into the " second category," reserved for the worst criminals and all political offenders. They were housed in the citadel under constant military supervision, and were daily employed in turning the mill-stones in the lime kilns and in breaking up the old barrack buildings. In winter they were taken down to the frozen

river and put to hard and useless occupations. He has ably described the effects of the additional fatigue derived from working for mere work's sake as a mere physical hardship. He also declares, and I quite believe it, that the heaviest part of the punishment was the absolute deprivation of privacy year after year—not a moment alone! But the greatest mental torture of all which this young penman in his prime, full of ideas and plans, had to undergo was the inability to put pen to paper, and in that way to alleviate the cravings for literary work. His talent was being stifled.

Nevertheless he survived, purified and fortified. We have no occasion to imagine his tale, for it is before us, though under an assumed name, in all its details written down after leaving jail, under the title of *Recollections from the House of the Dead.* With the perusal of this book we are able to resume the study of his work as a propagandist, whilst at the same time continuing his life.

Oh, what a matter of chance, after all, is literary success, often so unjust!

The name and work of Silvio Pellico has made the round of the whole civilized world. They have classic fame in France, and yet this same France, the highway for all that is renowned and of large ideas, was until yesterday ignorant of the very title of that cruel yet superb book which, on account both of its consummate art and for the horrors it describes, is far superior to that of the Lombard prisoner. Are Russian tears less human than Italian tears?

The writing of this book offered great difficulties. In describing that yet mysterious country, the name "Siberia" had to be used, a name at this time not voluntarily pronounced. Even the judicial language employed a euphonism to avoid its use. The courts sentenced the condemned to transportation "to distant territories," and it was left to an erstwhile political convict to risk further persecution

by defying the censor. And he won. The fundamental condition for success was seemingly to ignore the fact of the existence of such people as political convicts. It was nevertheless necessary to describe the special nature of the sufferings which men of a superior class in life have to undergo, when suddenly thrust into these infamous surroundings.

The writer introduces us to a manuscript written by one Alexander Gorianchikoff, who died in Siberia after having been set at liberty. A short biography tells us that this dummy was an honest fellow, well educated, and belonging to the upper classes. The crime for which he was condemned to ten years' penal servitude was, God knows, nothing—less than nothing, a mere accident, one of those small things that cast no stain on either heart or honour. Gorianchikoff had merely killed his wife in a fit of justifiable jealousy. You do not think less of him, do you? Our judges would have acquitted him. Moreover, you will, no doubt, have guessed that he merely intended us to realize that the offence for which he was committed was no more than an error of judgment. This effected, he now makes us follow an innocent man, wrongly condemned, into the infernal regions.

A barrack within the fortifications, containing three or four hundred convicts brought together from all points of the compass, is a microscopic but faithful image of Russia, that wonderful mosaic of nationalities. There were Tartars, Kirghis, Poles, men from the Baltic provinces, and one Jew. During ten years of dreary boredom, Gorianchikoff's—read Dostoyevsky's—sole occupation is the study of these unfortunate people. The result is an unequalled work of psychological interest. From under the uniform garb of these wretches and their fierce and taciturn faces, we see character sketches gradually developed which show a profound analysis of the human instinct. His sympathies extend to all these " unfortunates " (malheureux) about

him. This is the term applied everywhere in Russia to any victims of justice. The writer willingly uses the same term,[1] and we realize how he, too, does not let his mind dwell on the crime, but on the need of greater compassion for the "sufferings of expiation," and to keep alight—for that is his object right through—the "divine spark" which is ever present amongst even the most degraded.

Some of the convicts tell him their histories. These form the material for dramatic bits, masterpieces of realism and feeling. The best are the stories of two murderers, moved by jealousy; one is the soldier Baklushin, and the other Akulina's husband. The philosopher does not pry into the past of the other convicts, and is satisfied with depicting their moral natures as he observes them, but in that general shadowy, vague manner affected by all Russian writers, who always see their characters in the dim light of dawn on a grey day, and whose outlines, always uncertain and undefined, invariably end in nebulous possibilities. They are the paintings of Henner, compared with those of our Ingres.

The language used is in itself very remarkable. It is that of the common people, always preferred by Dostoyevsky for its indefiniteness and easy flow, which make it marvellously adaptable to his purpose.

The greater portion of these natures may be brought into one type, applicable to all—representing an excess of impulse—*ochainie*, a state of mind for which I try in vain to find an equivalent in the French. Dostoyevsky analyses it thus:

[1] Bossuet in the same sense writes: "Then one begins to realize that there are 'unfortunates' languishing in our prisons and poor outcasts dying of hunger and sickness in some dark places."—(*Sermon on the Adoration of the Virgin.*)

"Unlucky, ill-starred ones" is the true meaning of the Russian word "neschasny" translated "malheureux."—(Tr.)

" It is the sensation experienced by a man who, standing at the top of a high tower, looks down into the depths below and is thrilled with ecstasy at the thought of plunging down head-foremost. The sooner the better—he says to himself—and all is over ! Often it is the most dull-witted, and most ordinary people who think thus. . . . Man finds a pleasure in horrifying others. . . . He allows his soul to fall into a state of frantic despair, and he looks upon the consequent chastisement as a solution, as something that will make a ' decision ' for him."

In a novel we shall presently refer to, *The Idiot*, our author relates a case illustrating that kind of mental aberration based on fact, so he assures us :—

" Two peasants, of middle age, friends of long standing, both sober, arrived at an inn. They ordered tea and a single room, in which they passed the night.

" One of them had, for the last two days, observed that his friend was wearing a silver watch hanging by a string of glass beads, which he had not before noticed. This man was no thief, he was honest, and, for a peasant, quite well off. But the watch had such an attraction for him, that it made him furiously desirous of becoming its possessor. He seized a knife and, as soon as his friend's back was turned, he crept up to him like a wolf, selected the spot, lifted his eyes to heaven, signed the cross, and devoutly murmured this prayer : ' Lord, forgive me, for Christ's sake.' He cut his friend's throat, as if he were a sheep, and took the watch."

Frequently during his periods of madness we come across strong doses of asceticism. See, for instance, the episode of that " Old Saint," a convict of exemplary behaviour, who throws a stone at the Commandant, solely for the purpose of " suffering affliction " under the strokes of the flogging that naturally followed. It made such an impression on Dostoyevsky that he brings the incident into his *Crime and Punishment*. There, he makes use of it for

the hundredth time to illustrate the "mystic sense" in which the Russian mind looks on suffering in itself as a propitiatory virtue. "And if this affliction comes 'by authority,' all the better!"

Here we see the idea of the Antichrist, who, for a great part of the people, especially among the innumerable sects of "the Raskol,"[1] is inseparably connected with the Temporal Power.

The scene of the "Old Saint" deserves being quoted in full, for it explains the writer's method and enables us to understand the country we are studying.

"He was small, white, emaciated, sixty years of age. I was struck with him the first time we met. He was in every way different from the other convicts, his look so calm and peaceful! I remember the pleasure it gave me to look at his clear, bright eyes surrounded by fine wrinkles. I often conversed with him. In all my life I seldom came across such a good creature, or a soul so frank. . . . He was sent to Siberia for an unpardonable crime. Following some conversions to Orthodoxy, due to a religious movement amongst the 'Primitive Saints' of Starodub, the Government, desirous of furthering the good work there, erected a church of the Orthodox faith. This old man, in company with other fanatics, had decided to 'resist this in the name of "The Truth,"' as they said, and set fire to the building. The instigators were all sentenced to transportation for life, the old man one of the first. He had been a well-to-do tradesman directing a flourishing concern. He left behind him at home a wife and children, but went into exile unflinchingly. In his blindness he considered his trials as a 'witnessing to the Faith.' After spending some time in his company, one could not help asking oneself the question, 'How is it possible for a man as gentle as an infant thus to rebel?' I frequently discussed matters of 'faith' with him, but he never once

[1] Dissenters generally.—(Tr.)

wavered in his convictions. His arguments never contained the least trace of rancour or resentment. It gave me pleasure to study him, for he never showed the least sign of pride or boastfulness.

"The old man was respected by everybody in the settlement without its making him at all vain. The convicts named him 'Our little uncle,' and never annoyed him, and I can well understand what ascendancy this gave him over his fellow-religionists. Notwithstanding the appearance of firmness with which he met his lot, his heart seemed to contain some secret, incurable sorrow, which he was determined to keep hidden from all eyes.

"We both slept in the same dormitory. One night, lying awake at four in the morning, I heard a muffled, timid sob. The old man was seated on the stove [1] reading his Greek Church formulary in manuscript. He was weeping and, from time to time, praying in a low voice, 'Lord, do not forsake me! Lord, strengthen me! My poor children, my dear little ones, I shall never see you again!' I cannot tell you how sad I felt."

In connection with this, I will give a translation of the death of Michailoff, a piece of terrible realism:

"I knew little of this Michailoff. He was a young man, barely twenty-five; tall, thin, and with a remarkably good figure. He was a convict in the special division (reserved only for great criminals), extremely silent, and the whole time plunged in mournful abstraction. He had literally 'dried up' whilst in prison. So, at least, the other convicts, who always spoke well of him, described it. I only remember that he had beautiful eyes, and, for the life of me, I do not know why he so persistently comes into my mind. . . .

"He died one afternoon at three o'clock, on a fine, bright day when it was freezing hard outside. I remember that the sun was shining and sending its oblique rays through

[1] In Russia sometimes large enough to place a mattress on.—(Tr.)

the greenish frosted window-panes into the hospital ward, straight on to this poor wretch. He was unconscious, and took a long time to die. The death agonies lasted several hours. Since the morning he had not been able to recognize any one of those about him. Efforts were made to alleviate his pain, for it was evident that he was suffering a good deal. He breathed with difficulty, taking deep breaths, each accompanied with rattling noises. His chest heaved as if in want of air. He threw off the bed-coverings, then his clothes, and finally tore up his shirt as if it were an insupportable burden. It was frightful to see his long, attenuated body, with the skin of the arms and legs clinging to the bones, a cave-like stomach and a raised chest, with ribs sticking out—like those of a skeleton. The only thing to be seen on that body was a small wooden cross and the convict's chains. Certainly it looked as if his emaciated feet could easily have slipped the irons. For half an hour before his death all noise ceased in the room, and all conversation was in whispers. Those who had to move walked softly. The convicts spoke little and of nothing in particular; now and then they glanced towards the dying man, who was slowly passing away. Finally his unsteady hand searched for, and at last found, the wooden cross, and tried to tear it away as if even that was too heavy for him and stifled him. The cross was removed; ten minutes later he was dead.

"We knocked at the door to call the orderly on duty and informed him of what had happened. A warder entered the room and looked at the dead man in a stupid manner, and went to call the medical officer, who came at once. He was a good young fellow, rather a fop, with quite a pleasing exterior. His footfalls rang through the silent room as he quickly stepped up to the corpse. With an air of indifference, no doubt assumed for the occasion, he felt the pulse, tapped the chest, indicated by a gesture that all was over, and left the room. The Commandant

was at once notified, for the criminal was of importance, he belonged to the special division, and special formalities were required for identifying the deceased. Whilst waiting for the guard, one of the convicts in a low voice suggested that it might be as well to close the dead man's eyes. Another, who heard him, noiselessly approached the dead man and lowered the eyelids. Seeing the glittering cross on the pillow, the man picked it up, looked at it, and then placed it round Michailoff's neck, and crossed himself. Meanwhile the face stiffened; a ray of light touched the surface; the mouth was half opened, showing two rows of good white teeth shining between the thin lips that clung to the gums.

"At last the sergeant of the guard appeared, fully equipped, helmet on head, followed by two hospital orderlies. He came forward with noisy step, looked suspiciously at the convicts, who, now in a circle round him, glared at him.

"When close to the body he stopped abruptly as if glued to the spot. It seemed as if he were frightened. This skeleton, stark and naked, with nothing on but the irons, seemed to overawe him. The sergeant loosened his chin-strap, took off his helmet—a thing no one present would have thought possible—and crossed himself slowly and ostentatiously. He was a fine-looking, grizzled old veteran. I recall that at that moment old Chekunoff's white head was close to that of the Sergeant. Chekunoff kept his fixed on the man, looking straight into the whites of his eyes and taking in every fleeting expression. Their eyes met. All of a sudden Chekunoff's lower lip was seen to tremble, it then contracted, showing the teeth, and the convict, pointing with a quick movement to the dead man, murmured as he turned away: 'After all, he also had a mother!'

"I remember how those words pierced me like an arrow. Why did he say that? . . . The corpse was removed on

the camp bed on which it lay. The crumpled straw mattress creaked and the chains rattled on the floor amidst the general silence. They were taken up, and the corpse was removed. Forthwith the convicts began to talk noisily. The sergeant was overheard ordering some one to fetch the armourer. The dead had to be unchained. . . ."

Here we see his method laid bare, with all its merits and its defects, its insistence, and the minuteness of the details of every action.

Between such tragic scenes we also find the more agreeable instances of kind-hearted devotion to the convicts. Such a one is that of the widow who came every day to the door of the citadel with small presents, or to give them any news or gossip, and never without a smile of encouragement. She could do very little, for she was very poor herself, " but we prisoners all felt that close by, on the other side of the prison wall, there was one at least who loved us, and that was already a good deal."

I select one more page, one of the most terse and touching, the story of an eagle set at large by the convicts " that he may at least die at liberty." One day, returning from work, they had captured one of those large Siberian birds, having a broken wing. He was kept within the ramparts some months, was well fed, and kindly treated in the hope of taming him, but he crouched in the corner of his shelter, and flew at any one approaching too close, looking fiercely at the men who had made him share their prison, so that he was then left alone and neglected.

" He seemed to be proudly awaiting death, trusting nobody, hating everybody. At last, one day, the convicts quite by chance remembered him. After completely neglecting him for two months it seemed as if all had suddenly agreed to be kind to him. It was decided to set him free. ' If he has to die, let it be at liberty,' said some of them.

" ' Agreed,' said others; ' a bird of freedom, wild . . . cannot be made to live in prison.'

" ' That means, that he is not the same as we are,' hazarded some one.

" ' What rot ! he is a bird and we are men. The eagle, comrades, is the King of the forests. . . ! ' began Skutaroff, that florid speaker; but no one heeded him this time. After the mid-day meal, when the drums had called ' to work,' the eagle was seized—beak carefully held at a distance, for he bravely defended himself—and was taken outside the palisade. Arrived on the glacis, the dozen or so of men who had formed the escort loitered awhile, curious to see what the bird would do. Strange ! For no apparent reason they all seemed as happy as if they were in some way to share that promised freedom.

" ' The brute ! we wanted to do him good, and there he is biting away like mad ! ' said the man who was holding him, and at the same time looking at him pityingly.

" ' Let him go, Mikitka ! '

" ' Yes, poor devil, he is not made to live in a fort. Give him his freedom ! beloved freedom ! '

" The bird was thrown over the parapet into the open. It happened late on a cold autumn afternoon. The wind was howling over the barren steppe among the tall grass, already yellow and dried up. The eagle flew off with difficulty, owing to his lame wing, straight into the horizon, as if anxious to get out of sight. The convicts watched his head as it disappeared through the long grass.

" ' Look at the blackguard ! ' said one of them thoughtfully.

" ' He has not come back,' said another. ' Not once has he looked round, brothers. He only thinks of his own freedom.'

" A third said, ' Well, I never ! Did you think he would come back to thank you for your kindness ? '

"'Right. He is now free! he knows what liberty means!'

"'Let us rather say—independence!'

"'He is out of sight, brothers.'

"'What are you a-loafing there?' shouted roughly the guard. 'Quick march!'

"And all returned sorrowfully to their labour."

On opening the book we find that it at once commences in such a heartrending strain that one wonders how the writer will manage the climax. How will he apply his habitual method of gradually accumulating his dark touches to obtain the culminating point of harrowing terror?

He has succeeded, however, as those will learn who have the courage to read further to the chapter on corporal punishment, and the description of what takes place in the hospital ward where the convicts are laid out after their scourging. I doubt if it is possible to describe any sufferings more horrifying, or in surroundings more revolting. It is enough to discourage our vivisectors, for I defy them to do better in their descriptions of surgical operations.

And yet Dostoyevsky is not of that school. The difference is difficult to define, but it is felt. The man who visits a hospital to see special diseases out of mere curiosity is severely commented upon, but he who goes there to study the diseases deserves respect. It all rests with the motive actuating the writer, and the reader is not to be deceived, however cleverly the intentions may be disguised. When his realism is merely fantastical he may awake some morbid curiosity, but in our hearts we condemn him, as I do myself, and we do not like the author any the better for it. If, on the contrary, it is manifest that these æsthetic details serve to illustrate an idea, that they contain an object lesson which we wish to propagate, we may disagree about the æstheticism, but our sympathies will be with the author. The disgusting will become ennobled,

as does the ulcer under the fingers of the Sisters of Mercy.

This is Dostoyevsky's case. He writes to cure. He raises with careful hand, but mercilessly, the sheet which hung before the eyes of the Russian people and veiled their own infernal Siberia, that " Dante's girdle of ice " lost in the distant shadows. The *Memories of the House of the Dead* became for transportation what the *Hunter's Tales* had been for serfdom—the tocsin of reform. To-day, let me hasten to add, these repulsive scenes are only ancient history. Flogging is abolished, and the prison system in Siberia is on as humane lines as in our own country. By reason of these results let us forgive this torturer the secret voluptuous delight he finds in unnerving us when holding up this middle-age nightmare to our view, with its thousand, aye, two thousand, strokes on the bleeding back, the facetiousness of the floggers, the nauseous sights in hospital, the men gone mad from fright, the diseases caused by this martyrdom !

It is well to overcome one's squeamishness and to continue the perusal; for it tells us better than any long philosophical discussions of the existing customs, and of the actual character of a country where such things could happen only yesterday, and could be told, as it is in this book—as a mere commonplace occurrence, without the author finding it necessary to intrude with a single remark of astonishment or resentment. I well know that this impartiality is merely a part of style, a literary method, partly due to the susceptibilities of the censor. But the mere fact that such a method is accepted by the reader, that such horrors can be placed before him as the common events in the social life of the day, shows us that we have been taken out of our own ordinary world and must expect to read only of the extremes of good and evil, barbarity, courage, and abnegation. Nothing can astonish us about men who go to the convict cell, Bible in hand ! From the

quotations I have made we can realize how these fanatics have been impregnated with the ancient spirit of the New Testament which spread over the Near East, but has since changed into a spirit of asceticism and martyrdom. Their errors as well as their virtues spring from the same source.

In truth, I am in despair when I think of trying to explain these people to our own; that is to say, to attempt to bring into a common bond the brains haunted by such different ideas petrified by such diverse hands. Those people come straight from the Acts of the Apostles—whether "raskol" peasants in pursuit of penitential suffering, or an author writing of his own experiences with mild resignation. And this gentleness is not all mere attitude. Dostoyevsky has told us a thousand times, since, that his experiences were good for him, that he had learnt to love his brethren, the people, to discern their innate greatness even down to the worst of criminals :—"Destiny, bringing me up as a stepmother, was in reality my own mother."

The last chapter might have been given the title "The Resurrection." One follows the feelings, developed with rare ability, that come over the prisoner on nearing the time of his release, as also at the very moment of his receiving his freedom. One seems to be witnessing a glorious dawn, and the gradual breaking of the day among the shadows, up to the moment of the sun's appearing.

During the few remaining weeks, Gorianchikoff (the hero in the novel) is allowed a few books and a back number of a magazine. For ten years he had read only the New Testament, and had heard nothing of the outer world.

After this long interruption, and on once more taking up the threads of life, his emotions are unique. He finds himself in a new world, and cannot understand even the simplest words and things. His astonishment is great in seeing what giant strides his generation has been able to take —without him! Doubtless these are the thoughts of one who will take part in "The Great Resurrection."

Finally the solemn hour has struck. With great emotion he bids his companions farewell. He leaves them almost with feelings of regret. One leaves something of one's heart everywhere, even in a convict prison! He goes to the forge, his irons clang to the ground—he is free!

III

Freedom indeed, but only relative. Dostoyevsky was placed in the ranks of a Siberian regiment. Two years later, in 1856, the change of reign brought him his pardon. Promoted to his former rank as an officer, and reappointed to all civil rights, he was shortly after authorized to send in his papers, but that was as yet far from receiving permission to return to Europe, and above all from obtaining leave to publish his writings, without which life to an author was as nought. At last, in 1859, after ten years of exile, he recrossed the Ural Mountains and entered a New Russia, in which everything seemed changed, everything, so to speak, "aired," trembling with impatience and hope on the eve of the Great Emancipation.

He brought a wife with him, the widow of a late comrade in the Petrachevsky conspiracy, whom he met in Siberia, loved, and married. As with everything that concerned his life, this bit of romance during his exile brought him unhappiness, to be ennobled by self-abnegation. The young woman loved somebody else better, and it did not take long before she went over to the other man. For a whole year, so his letters show us, Dostoyevsky did all he could to further the happiness of the woman he loved, and of the man his rival, even to writing to St. Petersburg that all obstacles in the way of their union might be removed. "As for myself," he writes at the end of one of those letters, "by God! I shall drown myself or take to drink." This incident of his private life is

reproduced in his *Humbled and Outraged*, the first of his novels translated in France, but not the best.

The position of confidant to both sides, and of furthering a love affair which puts him in a state of despair, is no doubt possible, since the author has experienced it. I cannot tell whether she has been misrepresented, or whether we are more egoistical, but it is difficult to realize, and it certainly cannot be prolonged without becoming ridiculous. The slow development, the double dramatic action, shocks all our ordinary conceptions of good composition. As soon as we are interested in an intrigue, a second appears unexpectedly, quite distinct, but seemingly a copy of the first. I am quite willing to believe that the writer has in this separation of the two parts made rather a subtle artistic attempt borrowed from a process well known to the musical world. The principal drama awakes a far-away echo. It is the melody arrangement for the orchestra transposing the chorus heard on the stage. Or, if preferred, it is as if the two novels together imitate the play of two mirrors when on opposite walls, both reflecting the same object on to each other simultaneously. But all this is too subtle for the general public.

Moreover, some of the actors are unreal. Dostoyevsky had drunk deep of Eugene Sue, and from reading certain passages in his *Correspondence* I imagine he was at that time still under the influence of that dramatist.

His Prince Valkovsky is the traitor in a melodrama, and is taken straight out of the Ambigu.[1] On the rare occasions when taking his types from among the upper classes, he invariably went wrong. He knew nothing of the complex and discreet methods of hearts deadened by the social customs of the higher circles. Natasha's lover, that giddy youth for whom she sacrifices everything, is not worth much. I am quite aware that Cupid must never be asked for his reasons, and that it is more philosophical

[1] A theatre in Paris restricted to dramatic representations.—(Tr.)

to admire his strength independently of his victims, but the novel reader is not bound to be so philosophical; he expects to be made interested in the personality of the hero who is to be loved. He accepts him even if a scoundrel, but if stupid he cannot be abided. In France, at least, we would never allow the representation—though true, quite natural, and comforting—of an exquisite creature kneeling before an idiot. Being gallant, however, we might, if called upon, agree to it the other way—a genius adoring a fool of a woman! But that is as far as we can go.

Dostoyevsky has judged himself very severely. When referring to *Humbled and Outraged* in a press article, he wrote: "I acknowledge that my novel contains many dolls instead of people: that they are not characters artistically arranged, but mere perambulating talking machines."

With these reservations, let us say that the master's hand is to be recognized in both the female characters. Natasha is passionate love incarnate—but jealous. She speaks and acts like one of the victims in a Greek tragedy entirely at the beck and call of fatal Venus. Nelly, the delicious and fascinating little girl, is a sister to one of Dickens' delightful children. She ably personates the deep feelings of living religious ideas always present in the hearts of the Russian people when she says, "I shall go and beg in the street. There is nothing to be ashamed of in begging. I do not ask of any man in particular, but from everybody, and everybody is nobody. That is what an old beggar woman told me once. I am little, I have nothing, and I am going to ask everybody for something."

On his return to St. Petersburg, and up to the year 1865, Dostoyevsky became absorbed in journalism. The poor metaphysician had an unfortunate liking for this enticing work; but it used up the best part of his talent, and of his life. During this time he started two papers in which to defend the ideas he thought he had. I defy any one to

formulate his ideas in practical language. He had taken a standpoint about half-way between that of the Liberals and the Slavophiles, nearer the latter. Like them he had as a rallying cry the two famous verses of the poet Tucheff—

"One cannot understand Russia with one's reason,
One can but have faith in Russia."

It is no doubt a very worthy patriotic faith, but such a faith, replete with mystery, devoid of precise dogma, essentially escapes all explanation and argument. One believes or one does not, and that is the end of the matter. The great error of the Slavophiles is that for the last twenty-five years they have blackened mountains of pulp to find a reasonable justification for a sentiment. A stranger cannot enter into such debates, which presuppose a preliminary initiation and an acceptance of a definite faith. And he knows what he has to expect, whatever he may say or do. If he wishes to enter into the discussion he is informed that he is incapable of comprehension, and that holy linen can only be washed by the Levites in their own houses. If he keep aloof he is accused of being ignorant and contemptuous.

At this time especially, during the memorable years of the emancipation, their ideas, affected by the long years of restraint, had become foolish. The *metel* had arisen—that furious wind which at times whips up the snow-fields, darkens the air with its frozen flakes, effaces the tracks and hides the view. In this semi-darkness a train comes along with its engine smothered in its own dense vapour, propelled by imprisoned forces which make it tremble with impatience, and dashes at full speed into the unknown. Such was Russia in those days.

The *Memoirs* of M. Strakhoff, a fellow worker of Dostoyevsky at this time, contains a passage which deserves notice, for nothing can be more instructive as regards the state of affairs and the men at that period :

"These are the circumstances in which one of our editors, Ivan Dolgomostyeff, a most worthy and sensible young man, went suddenly mad under my very eyes. He died shortly after. He lived by himself in a furnished apartment. In the beginning of December, when the extreme cold began, he one day appeared before me, and begged me, with tears in his eyes, to save him from the persecutions and annoyances to which, he said, he was subjected in his rooms. I suggested his remaining with me at my house. A few days later, on returning home after midnight, I found him still awake. From the room where he slept he began to talk in what struck me as an incoherent manner. . . . . I begged him to stop talking and to go to sleep. I then slumbered. An hour or two later I was awakened by the sound of a voice. I listened in the dark. It was my guest, who was talking to himself. His voice became louder and louder, and he sat up in his bed. I soon realized that he was raving mad. What was to be done? It was too late to fetch a doctor or to go to a hospital. I awaited the dawn. For five or six hours I listened to his ravings. As I happened to know all his ideas, and the phrases in which my friend always expressed them, I was able to disentangle, if I may say so, the 'secret foolishness' of this madness. It was a chain of ideas and phrases I was long familiar with. It was as if this unfortunate Dolgomostyeff's whole soul and all his thoughts and sentiments had been pulverized into minute atoms, and that these had reunited anyhow. To most people the same thing happens on suddenly awakening, when thoughts and words which fill our brain condense into quaint, often insensate, imaginings. . . . There was one underlying thought which in a measure connected his ramblings. It was the ever-recurring wish to find a new line of action for our political party to adopt. It was with sorrow and fear that in my friend's delirious wanderings I recognized the discussions and themes which occupied

our columns as well as our literary debating clubs night and day the last few years." [1]

In this same way some of these brains actually burst from too inflated hopes; others became void through disappointed hope. Into these empty spaces Nihilism flowed freely and took possession. It was a fatal, logical sequence of shattered enthusiasms. This was the time of Dostoyevsky's advent, and from this moment he absorbed romance and politics. Abandoning the purely artistic idea, he separated from Gogol's influence, and consecrated himself entirely to the "new spirit."

In 1865 began a series of miserable years for our author. His second journal, like a literary charger, was killed under him and he lay crushed under its heavy weight of debt. He first lost his wife, then his brother Michael, who was associated with him in his work. To escape his creditors he flew abroad, first to Germany, then to Italy, to lead a wretched existence. Unwell, and continually interrupted in his work by his epileptic fits, he returned to Russia, only to raise money in advance, from his publishers. His letters were full of expressions of despair with regard to the unfavourableness of his contracts, which almost strangled him. Europe made very little impression on him. What struck him most was an execution he witnessed at Lyons, which, recalling to mind the scenes of Semenovsky, made it a stock subject for his characters to relate in all his future novels. "And for all that," he wrote at this time, "I have only begun to live. Funny, is it not? A real cat's life!" But, as a matter of fact, during that anxious time between 1865 and 1871, he composed three great novels: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *The Maniacs*.

The first marks the zenith of Dostoyevsky's talent, judging even from the translations alone. To men of science devoting themselves to the study of the human soul, it is of interest as containing the most perfect de-

[1] Strakhoff, "Souvenirs," *Œuvres Completes de Dostoyevsky*, vol. i.

scription of criminal psychology since that of *Macbeth;* those of an inquisitive nature, to whom, like Perrin Dandin, torture is always a pleasurable pastime, will find it excellent and quite to their taste. I fancy, however, that to most readers it will seem disgusting, and will not be read to the end.

One generally looks to a novel to give one pleasure and not to make one sick, otherwise to peruse *Crime and Punishment* would be taking an intentional risk, for it leaves an immoral taint behind. It is, moreover, highly dangerous for the female reader or for any impressionable nature. Every book is a duel between the writer, who aims at forcing on us a truth, a fiction, or terror, and the reader, who defends himself with indifference or with his reason. As a fact the author's power of frightening the reader is far superior to the power of resistance in the average nervous system. The latter is often overcome, and suffers inexpressible agony. If I permit myself to be so dogmatic, it is because of the many cases I have seen in Russia to this effect, as a result of reading that novel. Perhaps I shall be reminded of the special sensitiveness of the Slav temperament, but I can assure my reader that I have observed the same in France, where many have suffered in the same way. Hoffmann, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, all the well-known writers in the "alarming" style whom we know of, are but a joke to Dostoyevsky. In their fiction the author's cunning is appreciated; in *Crime and Punishment* one realizes that the author is quite as much terrified as we are by the character which he has drawn of himself.

The plot is a very simple one. A man conceives the idea of committing a crime. He matures it, carries it out, for some time escapes the clutches of the law, but is moved to give himself up, and expiates his crime. For once the Russian author has kept to the European custom of observing continuity of action. The drama, purely

psychologic, deals throughout with the struggle between the man and his ideas. The characters and the scenic accessories are of no interest beyond their actual influence on the criminal's settled purpose.

The first part, showing the conception and growth of the idea, is carried out with a truthfulness and exactness above all praise. The student, Raskolnikoff, a Nihilist in the true sense of the word, intelligent, without principles, broken down by misery and want, dreams of a better state of things. On his way back from having pawned a piece of jewellery at a miserly old woman's, the following vague thought passes through his brain, without his considering it of much importance: "An intelligent man possessed of the money this woman has, would be successful in anything. All that is required is to suppress this useless and noxious old thing."

It is but one of those small beginnings or larvæ of an idea, which have at least come once into every mind, or, during a feverish nightmare, through the words of a popular song, such as "Let us kill the Mandarin." But they can only gather thought or come into action with the assent of the will. This is seen to become stronger page by page, and eventually becomes an obsession. All the sad circumstances of that life by which Raskolnikoff is surrounded are brought in to further his object, and, in a mysterious way, are made to justify the "criminal intent." The plasticity of the force behind the man is placed before us in such a striking manner that we see it as one of the moving actions in the drama, like one of the "Fates" in one of the ancient tragedies. She takes the criminal by the hand to the moment when the axe falls on both the victims.

The horrible crime has been committed. Then the miserable creature is seen to struggle with the memories of the deed, as he did before when conceiving it. A new leading thought dominates the second part. The murderer's atti-

tude towards the world is now completely changed by the mere fact of having taken a life. Henceforth, seen through the crime, the world is given a new aspect and a new meaning, which deprives the culprit of the power of feeling and reasoning like other men, and excludes the possibility of his taking up a recognized position amongst them. The soul is entirely changed, and is completely out of harmony with life. Dostoyevsky takes good care to show us that this is not remorse as usually understood. His character will only feel remorse, with all its beneficent and restorative virtues, on the day of expiation. No—his is a complex and perverted sentiment, best described as a mixture of contempt for not having obtained greater advantages from such carefully made preparations, and indignation at the unexpected consequences to his conscience engendered by the act itself, as also for the feelings of shame at the discovery of his own weakness—for Raskolnikoff's leading characteristic is pride. The only interest he has left is to dodge the police. He seeks their acquaintance and their friendship. Possessed of the same spirit which drives a man to the brink of a precipice to experience the joys of dizziness, the murderer amuses himself by constantly entertaining his friendly police officials, and carries on the play to the extreme point where a single word would ruin him. At every moment we think he is going to pronounce that word—but he disengages and gleefully continues the awful game. The magistrate, Porfir, has guessed the student's secret; he plays with him like a tiger on the prowl, certain that his prey will be irresistibly attracted to him, and eventually Raskolnikoff knows himself found out. Several chapters are devoted to a fanciful and lengthy dialogue between these two adversaries; a double dialogue—one of the smiling lip which intentionally ignores, the other of the steady eye which sees and tells everything.

Finally, when the author has tormented us sufficiently

by witnessing this acute situation, he brings forward the salutary influence which is to break the criminal's pride and which is to reconcile him to himself through expiation. Raskolnikoff is in love with one of the unfortunate street girls. Do not for a moment suppose from the above brief sketch that Dostoyevsky has botched his work with the stupid theme which drags through our novels of the last fifty years—of a convict and such a woman acting together because they love each other. Notwithstanding the similitude of the circumstances, we are here, as will readily be seen when reading the further developments of the story, thousands of miles away from such a commonplace conception. With characteristic perspicacity he divines that in the psychologic state of mind caused by a criminal deed, the normal sentiment of love, as well as any other sentiment, undergoes a change and becomes tinged with the dark colours of despair.

Sonya, a humble creature, a victim of necessity, is almost unconscious of her disgrace, to which she has succumbed as she would to any other inevitable malady. Shall I reveal the author's innermost thought at the risk of making it impossible to believe in the existence of such mystic exaggeration? Well then, it is to Sonya an "appointed cross," which she carries with religious resignation! She loves the one man who has not treated her with contempt, and seeing him scared by a secret of his own, she tries hard to share it with him. After many and long struggles the confession escapes him. I am wrong—he does not utter a single word that might betray him. In a dumb scene, the acme of tragic action, Sonya sees the monstrous act passing before her in the depths of her lover's eyes. The wretched girl, for a moment overcome, quickly recovers herself. She knows the remedy. From her heart she cries: "We must suffer, and together . . . pray . . . expiate. . . . Let us to the convict prison!"

Here we are once more on the same ground to which

Dostoyevsky invariably returns, as being the fundamental idea of Christianity as conceived by the Russian masses, namely, a belief in the innate efficacy of penitential suffering, especially when endured together, and as possessing the unique virtue for solving every difficulty.

To explain fully the singular relations, pious and sad, between these two beings, and so foreign to all the usual ideas evoked by the word " love," and further to translate the expression preferred by the author, it is necessary to restore the etymological sense of our word " compassion " as understood by Bossuet,[1] viz. " to suffer with and through another." When Raskolnikoff throws himself at the feet of this girl who maintains her parents by her shame, and when she, the despised of all, becomes frightened and tries to raise him up again, he makes use of a phrase which holds the synthesis of all the books we are studying :—" It is not before thee I kneel—I prostrate myself before the sufferings of all humanity."

We may mention here in passing, that our author has never once succeeded in representing love unaccompanied by such subtleties—the simple and natural mutual attraction of two human hearts. He only knows it in the exaggerated forms : either when in connection with this mystic feeling of compassion towards an unfortunate being —of devotion without desire; or else the passions of the brute, if even contrary to nature.

The lovers he shows us are not made of flesh and blood, but of nerves and tears. Hence, an almost inexplicable aspect of his art. This realist who is prodigal with doubtful situations, and is crude in the way of telling them, never assails or disturbs the soul, but invariably confines himself to rending the heart. I defy anyone to find a single instance where sensual passions are evoked, even when woman is passed before us as a temptress. He only

[1] Referring to the two Sermons delivered on the Friday of Passion Week in 1660.

shows the nude under the surgeon's knife on a bed of suffering.

On the other hand, and quite outside the incidents of absolutely chaste love, the attentive reader will find in each novel one or two pages pricked by what Sainte-Beuve styles a "point of Saadism."

To be loyal, it is necessary to note these contrasts of this extravagant nature incapable of keeping to the "happy mean" between an angel and a beast.

The final issue can be easily surmised. The Nihilist, half conquered, hangs about the police office for some time longer, as a once savage animal, now tamed, comes crouching to the crack of the trainer's whip. At last he confesses and is condemned. Sonya teaches him how to pray, and the fallen creatures are then raised up again after expiating together. Dostoyevsky makes us follow them into Siberia, and in the form of an epilogue exultingly seizes the opportunity for recapitulating a chapter out of the *House of the Dead.*

Even after removing from the book its principal characters, there would still be left among the minor ones sufficient food for the mind for many years to come. Take, for instance, the three characters, the underling Marmeladoff, the magistrate Porfir, the enigmatic Svidrigayeloff, the man who *ought to have killed his wife*, whose lover approaches Raskolnikoff to discuss crimes in general. I shall not make any extracts, for this book has been translated by M. Derély, whose version is one of the few translations which are not obscure; but if there are any of our novelists who wish to improve the methods of realism without sacrificing any of their own style, I have much pleasure in referring them to the speeches by Marmeladoff with their funeral wakes, and especially the scene of the murder. It is impossible to forget them after having once read them. There are worse things yet, such as the scene where the murderer, always haunting the fatal spot,

reconstructs the whole affair for his own entertainment, where he rings the cracked bell of the apartment, to make the horrible moment more realistic when listening to its discordant sound.

I must repeat that, owing to Dostoyevsky's method of gradually increasing the agony, it would materially detract from their force if any passages were taken singly. What is most remarkable is the way the dialogues are woven together as if by the thinnest of electric wires through which a mysterious current flows uninterruptedly. A word which we may have left unnoticed, or the slightest fact, mentioned in one line, has its significance fifty pages further on. One has to go back to them to understand the transformations of a soul in which these germs, fallen there as if by chance, have developed in the dark. This is so true that if one skips a few pages the rest become quite unintelligible. One feels angry with the author for being so prolix, one runs on ahead of him, and, all of a sudden, he is no longer understood—the electric current has been interrupted. That, at least, is what everybody tells me who has tried it. How about our excellent novels which may indifferently be begun at either end? This one never bores, but it tires one, as does a thoroughbred always on the prance; add to this the necessity of finding one's way among the crowd of cunning people who, like shadows, glide about in the background. All this compels the reader's closest attention, and to have as good a memory as is required for the study of a philosophic work. It is a pleasure or an inconvenience, according to the quality of the reader. Moreover, a translation, however good it may be, seldom succeeds in giving the continuous vibrations underlying the text of the original.

The man who could write such a book, evidently based on his own experiences, can but be pitied. To understand how he came to write it, one has to remember what he said to a friend—holding the same opinions—after one of these

fits of madness : " The depths into which I am plunged on those occasions may be described thus : I feel myself a great criminal, as if a great unknown sin, the deed of a scoundrel, weighed heavily on my conscience."

The periodical which published Dostoyevsky's serial stories, frequently stopped short after a few pages, ending abruptly in the middle, followed by a few brief words of excuse. It was common knowledge that he was passing through one of his " attacks."

Crime and Punishment assured the writer of his popularity. In 1866 this literary event was on every lip. All Russia was affected by it. As soon as the book appeared a Moscow student attacked and murdered a pawnbroker, in every detail exactly as imagined by the novelist. Statistics would show that since then many similar murders had taken place suggested by the reading of that book. Of course there is no doubt about the fact that Dostoyevsky's intention was to prevent such crimes by the forbidding consequences that would follow, but he failed to perceive that the extreme exaggeration of his description would also have the opposite effect in tempting the demon of imitation who lurks in the cells of a demented brain.

I, also, find myself very much embarrassed when passing judgment on the moral value of such a work. Our writers will tell me that I give myself needless anxiety. I know they do not admit that this element should be dragged in when considering a work of art. As if anything can exist in this world without considering its moral value ! The Russian authors are not so high and mighty ; they, at least, profess to be " feeding souls," and the greatest injustice that can be done to them is to accuse them of scraping words together without furthering a cause. Dostoyevsky's novel will be considered useful or useless in accordance with one's belief in the efficacy, or not, of public trials and punishments. The question is the same. As for myself, my answer is in the negative.

IV

After this book his talents rose no higher. He gave a few more strokes of his mighty wings, but always in a circle among the mists of a darkening sky—like a huge bat in the twilight. *The Idiot* and *The Possessed*, and especially *The Brothers Karamazoff*, are spun out to intolerable lengths, and the " play " in each is no more than a pleasing embroidery which lends itself to all the author's theories, and into which he stitches all the types previously treated or imagined in the hell of his fantasy. It is a *Temptation of St. Anthony* painted by Callot. The reader is annoyed by a crowd of " shadow pictures " rushing about through the plot; big, cunning, chattering, inquisitive children perpetually occupied in criticizing other people's consciences. The entire novel is no more than a dialogue between two tub-thumpers or " brain-pickers " who with the craftiness of a Red Indian try to get at each other's secrets. These generally relate to a plot for committing some crime or to a love affair. The conversations recall the proceedings of the Inquisition under Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great; it is the same mingling of terror, duplicity and loyalty still remaining in the race. At other times, the disputants try to penetrate the maze of their philosophic and religious beliefs, and, like two doctors of divinity at the Sorbonne, assail each other with dialectics, at times subtle, or rude. Some of the words spoken also call to mind the dialogues between Hamlet and his mother or with Ophelia or Polonius. For two hundred years socialists have been discussing the question as to whether Hamlet was really mad when he spoke as he did, but whichever way the question is answered, the reply in either case is applicable to Dostoyevsky's heroes. It has often been said that the author and the characters who reflect him were simply as mad as Hamlet.

For myself I think that way of putting it stupid and wrong. Only very simple-minded people can refuse to admit the existence of psychological conditions other than those only experienced by themselves. When studying Dostoyevsky and his works we have to remember one of his favourite phrases which frequently flowed from his pen: "Russia is a freak of Nature." We find curious anomalies among the lunatics conceived by this romancer. They are absorbed in self-contemplation and furiously intent on analysing their innermost thoughts. When the author calls on them to take some action, they immediately rush to perform it blindly, obedient to the disordered impulses of their uncontrolled nerves and unreasoning minds, or one might say with wills set at liberty, and actuated by the most elemental forces.

Note the kind of acting in the play reproduced *ad nauseam*. The attitudes taken up by the body enable us to guess to what extent the mind has been perturbed. A character is hardly ever introduced to us seated at a table and occupied with something. "He was extended on the divan, eyes closed but not asleep. . . . He walked the street unconscious of where he was going. . . . He was motionless, his eyes intently fixed on some distant object. . . ." These people never eat, they drink tea, and only at night. Many are drunkards. They seldom sleep, and when they do, they dream. There are more dreams in Dostoyevsky's books than in all our standard works put together. They nearly always have fever. In every twenty pages we come across the expression "feverish state" at least once. Whenever these creatures come on, or come in contact with any of their kind, their "acting," as shown by every new paragraph, is invariably, "He shivered . . . he made one bound . . . his features contracted . . . he became as pale as wax . . . his lower lip trembled . . . his teeth chattered. . . ." Or else there are long pauses in the conversation and the two

speakers glare at each other. Of the innumerable people invented by Dostoyevsky I do not know one whom Charcot, the famous alienist, could not have claimed as his own under some guise or other.

"The Idiot" is the most laboured of the author's characters; his favourite child who takes up a whole volume all to himself. Dostoyevsky describes himself in this character, as all authors do, certainly not as he really was, but such as he would like to be. To begin with, "The Idiot" is an epileptic. These attacks provide the means for permitting all emotional scenes to find their climax in the most unexpected manner. The author feels an unbounded joy in describing them. He assures us that for a few seconds previous to the attack the soul is flooded with a sense of extreme ecstasy. We can take his word for it. The nickname of "The Idiot" was given to Muishkin, because, as a young man, that special illness had so altered his faculties that he has been somewhat queer ever since. Taking the soundness of his pathology for granted, this imagined character is enlarged upon with astonishing verisimilitude.

Dostoyevsky had evidently at first intended to adapt Don Quixote—the ideal type of a "redresser of wrongs"—to contemporary literature. Here and there we find signs of such an attempt. Soon, however, carried away by his own creations, he takes a higher flight and brings into that soul—in which he sees and admires himself—the most sublime Gospel teachings, and makes despairing efforts to enlarge the character by implanting into it the moral qualities of a saint.

We have to imagine the exceptional case of a being, a full-grown man by virtue of his matured intelligence and highest good sense, but retaining the simple heart of a child —who, in a word, personified the evangelical precept, "Be ye as little children." Such is Muishkin, "The Idiot." The aforesaid nervous complaint happily lends itself

towards bringing about this desired phenomenon. The disease is made to abolish that portion of the brain which harbours one's defects, such as irony, arrogance, egoism, concupiscence, and has liberally developed all the other and nobler parts. On leaving the lunatic asylum this extraordinary young man is plunged into the current of ordinary life. It looks as if, not being equipped with the villainous weapons we possess for defending ourselves, he was going to drown there. Far from it. His simple uprightness is stronger than all the wiles used against him; it solves all difficulties and brings him triumphant out of every ambush. His simple words of wisdom end all discussions. They are as the profound words of an ascetic who, when addressing a dying man, says : " Pass on before us, and forgive us our happiness." In another place he says : " I am afraid I am not accounted worthy of my sufferings." There are hundreds of other sayings all in the same strain. He lives in a world of usurers, liars, and scoundrels who, whilst they treat him as an idiot, respect and venerate him, and eventually submit to his influence and become better men. The women also begin by laughing at him, but they, too, end by loving him. His response to their adoration is limited to the expressions of tender pity and of that compassionate love which is the only feeling Dostoyevsky allows his heroes.

The writer incessantly returns to his one obstinate idea of the supremacy of the " simple mind," and of the sufferer. I would nevertheless like to probe this dogma to the bottom. Why this envenomed attack by all Russian idealists against thought and against the fulness of life? The meaning of this hidden and unconscious unreasonableness I think is this : Their instincts tell them to believe as a fundamental truth that to live, to act, to think, is to attempt the inextricable task of separating good and evil.

All action " creates and destroys " at the same time, and is entirely dependent on somebody or on something. There-

fore not to think, not to act, is to escape the fatality of producing evil alongside of the good; and as the bad affects them more than the good, they take refuge in doing nothing. They admire and sanctify "The Idiot"—the neuter, the inactive. He does no good, it is true, but he does no harm, consequently according to their conception of the world his is the better part.

I go boldly amongst these giants and monsters, who appeal to me, but how can I pass over in silence such a one as the shopkeeper, Rogojin, a very realistic figure, one of the most powerful the artist has ever drawn? The twenty pages in which he shows us the tortures of love this man's heart had to endure are by the hand of a great master. The passion is so intense and acquires such a power of fascination that the woman he loves comes to this savage whom she hates, against her will, well knowing that he will kill her. This actually happens, and standing by the bedside of the strangled woman he calmly discusses philosophy with a friend, the whole night long. There is not a trace of the melodramatic. The scene is quite simple, at least it appears so to the author, and that is the very reason why it makes one icy cold with horror.

Rare as the occasions are for enlivening these studies, I must also notice the drunken little pawnbroker who "every evening prays for the peaceful repose of the soul of Madame la Comtesse du Barry." But do not think that Dostoyevsky wishes to enliven us. No, it is in all seriousness that—by the words of the character personifying himself—he is moved to pity by the tortures of Madame du Barry undergone during her long journey on the tumbril and in her struggles with the executioner. Always recalling that fateful half-hour on the 22nd of December 1849!

In *The Possessed* we have the world of the revolutionary Nihilist before us. I have slightly modified the Russian title of *The Demons*, for it seemed rather obscure. The

author has made his own meaning quite clear, by taking St. Luke's text referring to the exorcising of the one "possessed" of the devil as his epigram. He has put aside the real title, which applies, not only to this book, but to all his others. Dostoyevsky's characters are all in the state of being "possessed," using the word in the sense as understood in the Middle Ages. An outside and irresistible power compels them against their wills to commit monstrous acts. Such "possessed" are Natasha in *Humbled and Outraged;* Raskolnikoff in *Crimes and Punishment;* Rogojin in *The Idiot*, and all those conspirators who commit murder and self-murder without a motive and without a definite object.

The history of this novel is curious enough. Dostoyevsky was always separated from Turgeneff by differences of political opinion, and alas! by literary jealousy. At this time Tolstoy had not yet established his own power, and the two novelists had the field to themselves wherein to dispute for the leadership of the Russian mind. The inevitable rivalry between them in Dostoyevsky almost amounted to hatred. He placed himself entirely in the wrong; and in the novel before us he took the unpardonable step of ridiculing his fellow author on the stage, in the garb of an absurd character.

The secret grievance which he would not forgive was that Turgeneff had been the first to discover Nihilism and to write about it in his famous book, *Fathers and Sons.* But since 1861 Nihilism had ripened; it had passed from the stage of metaphysical discussion into the field of action. Hence Dostoyevsky wrote *The Possessed* in revenge. Three years later Turgeneff took up the challenge by publishing *Virgin Soils.* Both novels dealt with the same subject—a revolutionary conspiracy in a small provincial town. Were I to adjudge the prize in this bout, I confess I think the gentle artist of *Virgin Soils* had been beaten by the dramatic psychologist, for the latter manages, better than

the former, to enter into the innermost recesses of these tortuous souls. The scene in which Shadoff is murdered is rendered with diabolical force, which Turgeneff could never have attained. But as a last criticism, which applies to both works, I cannot help recognizing their Bazaroff lineage. All their Nihilists have directly descended from their imperishable prototype, the cynical hero of *Fathers and Sons*. Dostoyevsky felt it himself, and it distressed him.

And yet his part is quite good, for his book is a prophecy and an explanation. A prophecy because in 1871, at which time the leaven of anarchy was still brooding, the visionary gives us facts on all points analogous to those which have since come to pass. I have myself attended Nihilistic prosecutions. I can testify to the fact that many of the accused and many of the murders committed were precisely those depicted and predicted by the novelist.

The book is also an explanation. If it is translated, as I so much wish it to be,[1] Western Europe will be able to learn the real data of the problem, of Nihilism, which have hitherto not been known because they have been sought for in the field of politics. Dostoyevsky has shown us the various kinds of minds from which this sect is recruited. First comes the "simple-minded," the pervert who places his capacity for being led by religious fanaticism at the service of atheism. Our author has a striking way of using him. It is well known that every Russian peasant's room contains a small shrine on which stand holy pictures.—"Lieutenant Erkel, after having overturned and smashed the images with a hatchet, using the shelves as pulpits placed on them copies of Vogt, Moleshott and of Büchner; and before each open volume he placed a lighted candle."

Next to the childlike and simple-minded come the "weak-minded," those who submit themselves to the magnetic influence of force, and follow their chiefs wherever they may

[1] Since appeared in May 1886, translated by Mr. Deléry.

lead. Then come the ' logical pessimists,' like the engineer Kirilof—those who destroy themselves because they have not the moral courage to live, and who are exploited by the party; for the man who is without moral principles, and is intent on dying because he cannot find such principles, lends himself willingly to what is wanted of him, it being a matter of no consequence to him.

Lastly come the ' possessed,' those who deliberately kill as a protest against a world they cannot understand; to make a singular and novel use of their will power; to find a delight in imparting terror, and, lastly, to assuage the ferocity of the brute which is in their nature.

The great merit of this vague and badly constructed book, often ridiculous and encumbered with apocalyptic theories, is that in spite of those blemishes it gives us a clear idea of the force that gives the Nihilists their power. That force is not inherent in their doctrines, which are absent, nor in the power of their organization, which is overrated. It lies only and solely in the character of a few individuals. Dostoyevsky thinks—and the revelations made during the legal proceedings would bear him out—that the worth of the conspirators' ideas is almost nil, that the vaunted organization is reduceable to that of a few local associations, badly welded together, and that all those phantoms of " central committees," " executive committees," only exist in the imagination of the adepts. On the other hand he makes much of those wills stretched to the uttermost, and those souls of ice-cold steel. He contrasts them with the timidity and irresoluteness of the legal authorities as personified in Governor von Lembke. Between these two poles he shows us the mass of weaklings attracted to the one possessing the greater magnetic force.

It cannot be repeated too often: it is the characters of those resolute men which take hold of the people, not their ideas; and the philosopher's piercing eye in this matter

looks beyond Russia. Men are everywhere becoming less and less unreasonable as regards ideas, and more and more sceptical as regards cut-and-dried formulas. Those who believe in the virtue of absolute doctrines are now rare to find. What does captivate men is character, even if their energies are put to a wrong purpose, for that guarantees a leader and a guide, the first requirements of an association of human beings. Man is born the "serf" of every will stronger than his own that passes before him.

With the publication of *The Possessed*, and the return of Dostoyevsky to Russia, commenced the last chapter of his life, from 1871 to 1881. It was less sad and trying than the previous ones. He married a second time, a brave and intelligent woman who helped him to get out of his material embarrassments. His popularity increased, and the success of his books enabled him to obtain his discharge. Seized once more by the demon of journalism, he contributed first of all to a newspaper in St. Petersburg, and ended by editing a periodical, all to himself, named *The Notebook of a Scribe*. This monthly publication appeared occasionally. It had nothing in common with what we understand by a newspaper or a review. Had Apollo started a Delphic "Gazette" for recording the intermittent Pythian oracles, it would have somewhat resembled Dostoyevsky's publication. It was his chief occupation in later years, into which he poured all the political, social and literary ideas which tormented him. It also contained anecdotes and recollections of his life. I do not know if he had ever heard of the *Words of a Believer*, by Lamennais, but he often makes one think he had.

I have already shown that his political belief may be summarized as an everlasting faith in Russia's destiny, and a glorification of the goodness of heart and intelligence of the Russian people. His mystic hymns escape all analysis or argument.

The Notebook of a Scribe commenced its life on the

eve of the war with Turkey, and appeared regularly during those years of feverish patriotism. It reflected the period of enthusiasm and discouragements which shook "Russia in arms." I do not know what there exists that is not to be found in this "summary" of Slavonic dreams which deal with every question affecting the human race. There is only one thing missing—a concrete dogma that the understanding can take hold of. Here and there we come across touching episodes, brought before us with consummate art, yet as pearls lost in troubled waters, though agreeably reminding us of the greatness of this romancer. The *Notebook* was a success among that special class of the public which was less friendly to his ideas than to his person —in other words, to the sound of Dostoyevsky's voice. Meanwhile he composed his last book, *The Brothers Karamazoff*.—I have not as yet mentioned a novel entitled *Growth*, published soon after *The Possessed*, for bringing the information regarding the current movement up to date. It is very inferior to all his former works and its success was only a moderate one. The same holds good of *The Brothers Karamazoff*. It is commonly admitted that very few Russians have had the courage to read this interminable story to the end. And yet, in the midst of inexcusable digressions and through nebulous smoke, one comes across some truly epic figures and scenes, worthy to find a place among the author's best—such is, for instance, the "Death of the Child."

The entire work of such an author cannot be done justice to in a single chapter of a book on the history of a literature. Fancy, fourteen volumes of formidable Russian octavo, each containing a thousand pages of French print! It was not unnecessary to give this detail, because the "material physiognomy"—the outward appearance of books—afford a good indication of the literary customs of a country. The French novel is becoming lighter and lighter, capable of being slipped into a hand-bag for use on a short railway

journey, whilst the heavy Russian novel is meant to be enthroned for a long time on the drawing-room table in a country house for use during long winter evenings. It encourages thought in connection with patience and eternity!

I can still see Dostoyevsky entering a friend's room the first day *The Brothers Karamazoff* was published, carrying the volumes under his arm, saying with pride: "They weigh five pounds!" The unhappy man had weighed his novel and he was actually proud of what should have dismayed him!

I really intended to limit my task to calling attention to this writer—so famous over yonder, almost unknown here—and to pointing out the three great portions of his work that best set forth the different qualities of his talent. These are *Poor Folk, The House of the Dead,* and *Crime and Punishment.*

The comments I have made will no doubt allow the reader to form his own judgment on the merits of his work as a whole. It is difficult to do so when viewed from the standpoint of our ideas of morality and taste. It is first necessary to look upon Dostoyevsky as a phenomenon belonging to another world, a powerful but incomplete, intense and original monster. The shudder we feel on meeting some of his characters may raise the question whether we are not face to face with a genius. But a literary genius, we know, must be gifted with the two essential attributes of proportion and universality. The former is the art of adjusting, of selecting, and of condensing one's thoughts, and in a few lightning flashes setting forth the whole of the meaning underlying them. By universality I mean the faculty of being able to grasp things as a whole and to present all their different manifestations in a manner adapted to each other. The world is not composed only of gloom and tears. Even in Russia one can find light, happiness, flowers and joys. Dostoyevsky only saw the

one half, judging by his having written but two kinds of books—sad books and terrifying books. He is like a traveller who has been all over the world, seen everything, but has travelled only by night. He is an incomparable psychologist, but only as a student of dismal and mangled souls. He is a clever dramatist, but only amongst scenes of terror and compassion.

No one has brought realism forward so ably. See, for instance, the account of Marmeladoff, in *Crime and Punishment*, with its portraits of the convicts and the picture of their existence. No one has dared to be so fantastical. And look at the personality of *The Idiot*. He no doubt painted the realities of life truthfully and harshly, but his pious dreams carried him away and aloft beyond those realities, in a superhuman effort towards a novel rendering of the Gospel. If you wish, it may be called "mystic realism." Human nature, from whatever point of view it may be looked at, comprises both the compassionate heart of a Sister of Mercy and the spirit of a Great Inquisitor. To me he seemed living in another world. Neither Dostoyevsky nor his heroes belong to ours, but rather to that fraction of the Russian peoples drawn from the East.

I see him better suited to the times of great cruelties and of great religious devotion, hesitating between a Saint Vincent de Paul and a Laubardemont, outstripping the former in reclaiming waifs and strays, lingering behind the latter so as not to miss one spark at the burning stake.

According to the special and peculiar excesses of his talent which touch us most, he may with justice be called a philosopher, an apostle, a madman, a consoler of the afflicted, or the murderer of peaceful minds, the Jeremiah of a convict prison, or the Shakespeare of an asylum—all these appellations are merited; taken separately, not one suffices.

Perhaps we ought to say of him what he himself in a passage of *Crime and Punishment* said of the whole race:—

"The Russian is a great man; vast as his country, terribly inclined to all that is fantastic and chaotic. It is a great misfortune to be great without a talent of a special kind." I concur. But I also agree with the judgment I heard passed on the book by an expert of modern psychology: "This opens out unknown horizons affecting spirits differing from ours. He reveals to us a new world, with natures more powerful for good or evil, stronger to will and to suffer."

V

I hope I shall be forgiven if, before finishing this sketch, I add some of my own recollections which may help the reader to realize the personality of the man and give a better idea of the power of his influence. I chanced to meet Dostoyevsky many times during the last three years of his life. His personal appearance had the same effect as that of the most striking scenes of his novels—once seen never forgotten. To look at he was indeed the very man for such a work and for such a life. Short, lean, neurotic, worn and bowed down by his sixty years of misfortune; faded rather than aged, with a look of an invalid of uncertain age, with a long beard and hair still fair, and for all that still breathing forth the "cat-life" already referred to. The face was that of a Russian peasant; a real Moscow mujik, with a flat nose, small, sharp eyes deeply set, sometimes dark and gloomy, sometimes gentle and mild. The forehead was large and bumpy, the temples very hollow as if hammered in. His drawn, twitching features seemed to press down on his sad-looking mouth. I have never before seen such a sad expression on any face. All the harrowing terrors of the soul, and the sufferings of the body had left their mark. No book of his could better convey the memories of the *House of the Dead*, or the long periods of terror, suspicion and torture

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he had undergone. Eyelids, lips and every muscle of his face twitched nervously the whole time. When he became excited on a certain point, one could have sworn that one had seen him before seated on a bench in a police court awaiting trial, or among the vagabonds who passed their time begging before the prison doors. At all other times he carried that look of sad and gentle meekness seen on the images of old Slavonic saints.

With that inexpressible mixture of coarseness, fineness and mildness so characteristic of the peasants of Greater Russia, he was indeed a true type of the masses. He also had a curious look of unaccountable restlessness, possibly due to the effort of keeping his thoughts concentrated on upholding his proletariat attitude. At first sight he was antipathetic, but only until his magnetism had affected one. Habitually taciturn, when he did speak it was in a low voice, slow and measured, gradually warming up when obstinately defending his opinions regardless of any one present. In arguing his favourite theme of the inherent supremacy of the Russian race, he sometimes was heard to say to the ladies in the social circles which sought his presence, "You are not worth a single mujik, however bad." All literary discussion with Dostoyevsky ended abruptly. He once stopped me with superb commiseration by saying, "We are blessed with all the talents of the whole world—even more—that of Russia; therefore we are able to understand you, but you are incapable of understanding us." May his shade forgive me, for I am now going to show the contrary.

His opinion is unfortunate in so far that he judged of European affairs with an amusing ingeniousness and native simplicity. I well remember one of his outbursts one evening in Paris, when seized by a fit of inspiration he prophesied with Biblical indignation—like Jonah before Nineveh. These are his words, which I noted down at the time:—

" A prophet shall one day arise in the Café Anglais; he will write on the wall the three flaming words; they will declare the destruction of the old world, and Paris will fall by blood and fire with all that fills it with pride to-day—its theatres, and the Café Anglais. . . ."

In the imagination of this seer, this inoffensive establishment represented Sodom's heart, a cave of attractive and infernal orgies, which has to be cursed and destroyed to prevent its being too much dreamt about. Eloquently and long he thundered on this theme like a Pope.

Dostoyevsky often reminds me of Jean-Jacques. It seems to me that I only got to know this vulgar pedantic fellow since I have studied this shadowy and gloomy philanthropist from Moscow. Both have the same kind of humour, the same alloy of coarseness and idealism, of sensitive refinement and brutal savagery and a common fund of human sympathy, all of which assured their success among their fellow contemporaries.

Since Rousseau no one has gone further than Dostoyevsky in exposing the faults of men of letters, as regards their easily offended self-esteem, their susceptibilities, jealousies and rancours. But none knew better than he how to win the generality of men or the masses by showing them a heart beating only for themselves. This writer, so disagreeable in society, was the idol of a great part of the Russian youth. Not only did they feverishly look forward to the publication of his novels, or his newspaper, but they came to him as to a spiritual preceptor, for a word of good advice and for help when in moral difficulty. During the last year of his life, his time was mostly spent in laboriously and conscientiously answering the mass of letters with which he was inundated, and which brought him the echoes of unknown sufferings.

One must have lived in Russia and at the time of the " great tribulation " to be able to understand the ascendency that man had over the " poor folk," consisting of that

class which is between the "masses" and the "middle-class" in quest of a new ideal. Turgeneff's literary and artistic talent had undergone an eclipse which was most unjust. Tolstoy's philosophy addressed itself only to intellectual people. Dostoyevsky took hold of the heart, and his part in the guidance of that movement was undoubtedly the greatest. At the inauguration of Pushkin's monument, in 1880, a time which was the "Grand Assize" of Russian literature, our romancer's popularity was greater than that of all his rivals. When he spoke, the people sobbed, and carried him in triumph on their shoulders. The students rushed his platform to get a better view of him, even to touch him, and one of those young men fainted from emotion on getting quite close to him. This flood of enthusiasm carried him so high that had he lived a few years longer it would have placed him in a very awkward position. In the official hierarchy of that Empire, as in Trajan's garden, there is no room for premature and too quickly growing plants; nor for a Giant Goethe or a King Voltaire. The late convict, in spite of the perfect orthodoxy of his politics, risked being compromised and brought under suspicion by his fanatical partisans. His greatness and his dangerousness were only realized the day of his death. However repugnant it is to me to end my study, already gloomy, with a mournful scene, I must give an account of this man's apotheosis and of the impression we all felt at the time, for it will serve better than any long explanation, and will at a glance enable the reader to see the position which that man actually held in that country.

On February 10, 1881, some of Dostoyevsky's friends informed me of the fact that he had died the evening before after a short illness. We went to his house to join in the service of "Prayers for the Dead," which in the Russian Church begins the moment one of her children closes his eyes and continues up to the time of burial.

Dostoyevsky's house was in a small street in one of the poorer parts of St. Petersburg. We found a compact crowd round the entrance and on the stairs. With great difficulty we pushed our way through into the study, in which the writer was having his first rest. It was a small room strewn with papers, and filled with people crowding round the coffin.

It stood on a small table in the only corner of the room not taken possession of by these unknown invaders. For the first time I saw on that face a look of peacefulness, from which every trace of suffering had passed away. . . . His features had a painless, calm look, and seemed at last to be having a pleasant dream among a "mountain of roses," which, however, was gradually disappearing at the hands of the people, who each took one to keep as a sacred relic. The crowd was getting larger every moment. The women were in tears, and the men noisily and roughly pushing their way, anxious to have a last look. The air was stifling. The room, like all rooms in winter, in Russia, was hermetically sealed.

All of a sudden the numerous candles began to sputter and went out. There only remained the uncertain light given by the small lamp hanging before the holy images of the Saints. At the same moment, favoured by the darkness, there was a rush from the stairs, bringing more people into the room. It seemed as if the whole crowd from the street was coming up. Those in front were pushed on to the coffin, which leant over. The unfortunate widow and her two children standing between the table and the wall threw themselves over the corpse to keep it in position, at the same time uttering frightful cries. For some minutes we expected to see the dead man trampled under foot. He was being swayed by this wave of loving and brutal humanity which, impelled from below, was near crushing him.—At that moment I rapidly recalled to mind all that the man had done in life, his cruel power, his own

feelings of terror, as also his compassion, and reflected on his exact relation to the world he wished to portray. All these unknowns before me took the names and features familiar to me. Imagination had depicted them in his books, reality had brought me in contact with them and this horrible scene so often described. Dostoyevsky's characters came to torment him unto the very end. They brought him now their clumsy and rough pity, careless as to whether it profaned the object of their compassion or not. This scandalous homage was exactly what he would have wished.

Two days later we beheld this same scene, but on a larger scale and more complete. February 12, 1881, is a date well remembered in Russia, for excepting possibly that of Scobeleff's no funeral has in that country been so imposing and of such significance. It would be difficult for me to say which of the two was the grander, that of the hero of action or that of the hero of Russian thought. Since early morning the whole town had turned out on to the Nyevski Perspect.[1] A hundred thousand people lined the streets by which the procession had to pass on its long journey to the Monastery of Saint Alexander Nyevsky. The mourners who followed the coffin were estimated at twenty thousand. The Government was anxious, for it feared a public demonstration. It was known that some of the turbulent spirits had planned to monopolize the corpse; and the students, who wished to carry the Siberian convict's chains in rear of the coffin, had to be forcibly restrained. The more timid minds protested that such a revolutionary pageantry should be forbidden altogether.

It will be remembered that this happened at the time of great nihilistic activity, a month only before the Tsar lost his life and the many daring attempts made to assassinate Loris-Melikoff. All Russia was in a ferment, and the least

[1] The principal street in St. Petersburg, leading up to the Palace. (iv.)

thing might have brought about an explosion. Loris-Melikoff decided it was wiser to respect the popular sentiment than to stifle it. He was right. The evil designs of a few were drowned in the tears of the multitude. By one of those unforeseen and unexpected fusions of the elements fired by a national idea of which Russia knows the secret, one saw all parties, all adversaries, all the disjointed rags of the Empire, reunited by this death into a "communion of enthusiasm."

Whoso witnessed this procession has seen all Russia in every shape or form. There were the priests, a numerous body of clericals chanting their prayers; students from all the universities; the children of the primary schools; the girl medical students; the Nihilists, easily recognized by their peculiar dress, the men with a shawl over the shoulders, the women with hair cut short and wearing spectacles; deputations from all parts of the Empire; aged shopkeepers from Moscow; and peasants in their sheepskins, lacqueys and beggars. Waiting in the church to receive the body stood the high officials—the State Minister for Education and the young Princes of the Imperial Blood. A forest of banners and crucifixes spread over this army on the march.

The spectators of this procession could not help being struck by the different expressions on the faces of these racial fragments of "All the Russias" as they moved along with looks gentle or sullen, with their tears, or prayers, or sneers, with their periods of thoughtful silence or dumb shyness, and which caused their own impressions to undergo many changes in succession. All of them judged by what they witnessed at the moment; and they really believed they saw, as group after group passed by, the historical advent of newly created classes, the triumphant march of revolution in the Capital of Nicholas, the solemn celebration of the national genius and the sorrows of an entire nation. But they all judged imperfectly. What passed

before them was but the result of this restless and formidable man's doings—of his majestic eccentricities. First and foremost and by far the greater number, we see his special clients, the "poor folk," the "humbled," the "outraged," even the "possessed"; the miserable wretches made happy in having this day the opportunity afforded them of honouring their advocate on his way to glory; yet with them and surrounding them were also all the uncertainty and the confusion of the national life as pictured by him, all the vague hopes he had roused within them. As said of former Tsars who "gathered together" the Russian soil, so this King of Spirits had to-day "gathered together" the Russian heart.

The crowd piled itself up in the small church of the Lavra, already encumbered with flowers, and in the shrines among the surrounding birch trees. The medley of interests, ideas and parties caused a babel of words. In front of the altar the Archimandrite spoke of God and Eternal Hope; others seized the body to lower it into the grave, there to speak of Fame. Officials, students, Slavophils, Liberals, professors, poets, one and all came to expound their ideas, and to claim for their own this spirit just passed away, and, as is usual in such cases, took the opportunity to flatter their own ambitions.—Whilst the February wind was blowing about their eloquence, in company with dried-up leaves and the dust of frozen snow stirred up by the spades, I endeavoured to form a fair judgment on the moral value of this man and all his deeds. I felt as perplexed as when called upon to form an opinion on the value of his literary work. He had spent himself for this people and evoked in them feelings of pity, even of piety; but at the cost of how many extravagant ideas and moral disturbances! He had poured out his heart on the crowd—which is good, but without having first made them acquainted with that severe and necessary helpmate of the heart—reason.

It would have taken me some time to form a judgment had I not suddenly had a vision of that life, born in a hospital, brought up in misery, in sickness, in pain, to be continued in Siberian prisons, in the barracks; ever pursued by want and moral distress, always being crushed and yet ennobled by the work of a—Redeemer. Then I understood that this persecuted soul escaped all known standards, because it stood alone. I bowed to the judgment of Him who carries as many burdens as there are hearts and destinies. And when I bent low over this last earthly refuge he was so long in reaching, and when in my turn throwing handfuls of snow on the bower of laurel wreaths beneath, I could find no other words of farewell than those the student addressed to the young girl, words which summed up Dostoyevsky's faith and now come back to him, " It is not before thee I kneel—I prostrate myself before the sufferings of all humanity."

CHAPTER VI

NIHILISM AND MYSTICISM—TOLSTOY

We have seen how through Turgeneff the "national novel" based on "Russian" customs and habits came into being. We have also seen how from the first, and in harmony with the trend of the national spirit he made a psychological study of the types commonly met with. Perhaps it would be correct to say he merely contemplated them, as this would better describe the serenity which, in this great artist, tempered his studies of the ethics. Dostoyevsky showed us, on the other hand, a genius which, though uncultivated and subtle, was influenced by compassion, tortured by tragic visions, and had an unhealthy taste for exceptional types. The former always remained in a state of mere flirtation with Liberal doctrines, the latter is ultra-Slavophil.

Tolstoy [1] has other surprises in store for us. Younger than his predecessors by a dozen years or so, he only just escaped the drastic consequences of the events of 1848.

A thorough gentleman, belonging to the upper classes, of a thoughtful turn of mind, he acknowledged no master, and belonged to no particular school of thought—or of politics, for which he had a profound contempt. He stands out as a phenomenon by himself. His first novel appeared at the same time as that of *Fathers and Sons* (by Turgeneff), but between the two authors there is a great gulf. One claimed connection with past traditions and with a European school-mistress, and he was indebted

[1] Complete edition, 2 vols. 8vo. Brothers Salayet. Moscow, 1880.

to us for his good quality as a precise writer. The other has broken with the past and all foreign tutelage. He represents a New Russia, restive of European control, rushing into the dark in search of her own course, scorning our advice on matters of taste—and is often beyond our comprehension.

Do not ask her to set bounds on herself—which she is the least capable of doing—or to concentrate her attention on any one point, or to subject her conception of life to any one doctrine. She demands of her literature a representation of the image of that moral chaos from which she suffers.

Tolstoy has appeared to perform that task. Before all others he is both the interpreter and the propagandist of that state of the Russian soul known under the name of Nihilism.

An attempt to measure the amount of such interpretation and to estimate the measure of this propaganda would be like going round and round in a circle.

The writer is like the crystal which, concentrating the sun's rays, deflects them with tenfold greater strength to burn and to set alight. In a *Confession of Faith*, just published, this romancer turned theologian in a few lines sums up his soul's wanderings thus—

"I have lived in the world for five and fifty years, and excluding the thirteen or fourteen years of my childhood, I have been for thirty-five years a Nihilist in the proper sense of the word; not in the misapplied sense of a Socialist and revolutionary, but strictly a Nihilist, meaning *void of all faith*."

There was no need for making this avowal so late in the day. All his works proclaimed it, though the formidable word was never once pronounced. Critics have credited Turgeneff with being the Father of Nihilism, because he gave the disease that name and described a few cases. As well say that cholera was introduced by

the doctor who diagnosed a first case, instead of by the first victim of the epidemic. Turgeneff discerned the malady and studied it objectively. Tolstoy suffered from it from the beginning without at first having a clear conception of what was the matter with him. On every page of his books his own afflicted soul decries the anguish which weighs heavily on the souls of so many of his race.

If those books are deemed the most interesting which faithfully represent a portion of humanity at any given moment, then our century has produced nothing to equal Tolstoy's; nor has it produced anything more remarkable from a literary point of view. I do not hesitate to give it as my matured judgment that this author, though only desirous of being known as a novelist, is one of the greatest of all the masters who bear witness to this century.

Is it possible to speak thus grandiosely of a contemporary, who is not even dead, who can be seen every day in his long overcoat, with his long beard, eating, reading the newspapers, receiving cash for his writings and investing the money, who in a word performs all the ordinary commonplace things of daily life? How can one write of greatness before the last pinch of dust has rotted away, or before the individual has been transformed into an abstract image that has received the general esteem of generations? It is difficult; but I see him before me so great that I believe him dead. I am entirely of Flaubert's opinion, who after reading a translation which Turgeneff had sent him, with a stamp of his foot, expressed his feeling in a thundering voice: "Why, this is Shakespeare. It is Shakespeare!"

By a singular and frequent contradiction, this restless spirit floating about in the mists of Nihilism is gifted with an unequalled lucidity and power of penetration for the scientific study of the phenomena of life. It can rapidly and correctly analyze everything on earth affecting the outer or inner man. First as regards the tangible realities,

next the play of the passions, the most fugitive of actions, or the slightest uneasiness of conscience. One might say the spirit of an English scientist in the soul of a Buddhist—the only imaginable combination which could possibly explain all Russia to our minds. Tolstoy moves about in the human world with a simplicity and naturalness which seems to be forbidden to our own writers. He observes, he listens, then paints the image and records the sounds of what he has seen and heard. It is for ever, and performed with a truthfulness which compels our admiration. Not content with bringing together the different characteristics of social life, he decomposes them into their respective basic elements with an inexpressible dexterity. His one endeavour is to find the 'why and the wherefore' of every action, and at the back of it he pursues the original idea, not to let it go until he has laid it bare, and pulled it out of the heart with all its hidden and now liberated roots.

Unfortunately his researches do not end there. These phenomena, which offer him such solid ground when examined by themselves, make him wish to classify and discover the hitherto unknown laws that harmonize and govern them. It is then that this clear mind becomes obscured. The daring explorer loses his foothold and falls into the abyss of philosophic contradiction. Within and without him he finds nothing but the gloomy void of night. To overcome this, to illuminate this darkness, he makes his characters speak the feeble explanations of metaphysics. Then, suddenly irritated by their elementary prattle, he makes them expose their own fallacies.

As Tolstoy proceeds along his life's work, more and more shaken by the universal scepticism, he continues to pour the flow of his biting sarcasm on those children of his imagination who still endeavour to believe and make every effort to apply a known and accepted system. But behind that seeming coldness one can notice the throbbing heart hungering after the things of eternity.

Finally, tired of doubting, tired of seeking, convinced that all conclusions derived from pure reasoning only lead to the humiliation of failure, and fascinated by that mysticism which for a long while since had been hovering over his disquieted spirit, the Nihilist now suddenly throws himself down at the feet of a God—of what God we shall learn presently. Before closing this chapter I purpose to set forth the singular phase he went through, and which led him to his present way of thinking. I wish to do so with all the reserve due to a living man, with all the respect due to a man holding sincere convictions.

I cannot imagine anything more interesting than the fundamental evidences Tolstoy has collected in his mind for his purpose. They epitomize what Russia's conscience is passing through now and bring them into the full light of day. He is the finished type. The solemn guide of a multitude of intellects, who puts into words what these minds but vaguely sense.

I

Born in 1828, Count Leo Nikolayevich is fifty-six years of age to-day.[1] His outward life affords no picturesque or romantic flavour; it is that of the ordinary Russian gentleman. In his ancestral country home, and later in the Kazan University, he received under foreign teachers that kind of education which gives these cultivated classes a cosmopolitan turn of mind. Entering the army, he passed several years in the Caucasus, in a regiment of Artillery. At his own request transferred to Sebastopol at the time of the Crimean War, he served there during that memorable siege. He gives his impressions of what he went through in three interesting accounts under the titles of *Sebastopol in December, May and August.* Retiring from the army after peace was declared, Count Tolstoy travelled abroad

[1] Written in 1885: Tolstoy died 1911.—(Tr.)

awhile, then, during middle age resided in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. In society and at court he lived—as during the war—always closely observing the shape and root of things, relentlessly tearing off their masks and piercing them to the heart. After several years of social life he left the Capital, partly, it is said, to escape the perils of the literary coteries who wished to enroll him.

About 1860 he married and retired to his patrimonial estates near Tula, which he has hardly left during the last twenty-five years.

The whole history of that life is the history of a mind unceasingly feeding on itself. We see its birth, the defining of its own nature and confessing its first pangs, in the author's own scarcely disguised autobiography, entitled *Infancy, Adolescence, Youth.* And we follow its evolution in those two great novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina,* eventually ending—as might have been foreseen—in the theological and ethical writings which for the last few years have entirely absorbed the writer's intellectual activities.

If I am not mistaken, the writer's first composition, whilst still an officer in the Caucasus, was a novel, or rather a short love story, published subsequently under the title of *The Cossacks.* It is the least systematic of his writings, but it is the one that best betrays the precocious originality of his mind—its gift of depicting only the naked truth. *The Cossacks* marks a date in literature, for it indicates the definitive rupture between Russian poetics and the Byronic romanticism which, for the last thirty years, had been entrenched in the very heart of its citadel.

Byronism had so strongly obsessed the romancers that their prejudiced eyes saw the East, where they lived, through the fanciful mind of a poet. There, as we have already seen, Pushkin, Griboyedoff and Lermontoff made their first appearance, but in the *Prisoner of the Caucasus,* as in *The Demon,* the impression then received transforms

the country and its people—the savage Georgian maidens into tender heroines, worthy sisters of Aïda and of the bride of Abydos.

Drawn as so many others are to this "The Lovers' Mountain," Tolstoy—that is to say Olenin, the hero in *The Cossacks* (and I can well believe these two to be one and the same)—leaves Moscow on a fine night, after a farewell supper with his youthful companions. Worn out by the plague of civilization and its conventionalities and "that eternal boredom which has passed into the blood from generation to generation," Olenin throws off and casts behind him his habitual thoughts as he would old clothes. A troika takes him into the unknown. He dreams of the pleasures of a primitive life, of new sensations and of new loves. It is all in the Byronic key. Lermontoff might have written this prologue. But wait!

We find our traveller installed in one of those outlying Cossack posts that form the great advance-guard on the distant banks of the Terek. He has fallen in with the life of his new friends, and joins them in their expeditions and hunting parties. An old mountaineer, who reminds one at once of Fennimore Cooper's *Leather Stocking*, takes charge of his education. Naturally, Olenin falls in love with the beautiful Marianne, the daughter of the house. How is Tolstoy going to give us something fresh about this used-up East, which has done duty so long? Simply enough, by painting it in its natural and true colours!

Instead of the lyrical illusions of his elders he substitutes in their place the philosophic aspect of the soul and of things. From the first moment of coming in contact with these Asiatics, the observer understood the puerility of applying to these creatures of mere instinct the refinements of our thoughts and sentiments and our theatrical manner of dealing with the human passions. He places the dramatic interest of his novel in the fatal misunderstandings that must exist between a civilized heart and

that of a savage creature, and in the impossibility of fusing into one common love two souls of such different natures. Olenin might well have wished to simplify his sentiments, but one's nature does not change, nor does one return to a primitive state by just putting on a Circassian headdress. His love cannot evade all the many intellectual intricacies with which our literary education encumbers our passions. " What is so awful," he writes, " and yet so sweet in my condition is that I feel I know Marianne, but that she will never understand me. She will not understand me, not because she is inferior to me, quite the contrary. She ought not to understand me. She is happy; and, like nature, equable, tranquil, self-contained." The picture of this little Asiatic maiden, mysterious and shy as a young wolf cub, is delineated with extraordinary fine lines. I call to witness all those who have been in the East and who can testify to the falsity of the Oriental types fabricated by European literature. They will also find in *The Cossacks* a surprising evocation of that other moral world.

If Tolstoy be able to make that world visible to us, it is because he presents it bathed in nature that explains it. This light idyll serves as a pretext for exact and magnificent descriptions of Caucasian scenery. Steppes, forests and mountains are made as vivid as their inhabitants. Their great voices control and uphold the human voices, as the orchestra sustains the melody in a chorus. In the days to come, when occupied in dissecting souls, the writer never again feels the same degree of profound sentiment for nature, that overflowing pantheism which makes Olenin say, " My happiness is to be with nature, to see her, to speak with her."

Pantheism and pessimism seem at first to be the two ruling tendencies between which Tolstoy's mind oscillates. The tale of the *Three Deaths*[1]—which I have already

[1] The three are : a tree, a woman, and a man.—(Tr.)

translated elsewhere—offers us the outcome of its philosophy, which is summed up in the words: "The happiest, the best, is he who thinks least, and who dies in the simplest way." According to that, the peasant is better than the lord, the tree is better than the peasant, and the death of an old oak tree is a greater loss to the world than the death of an old princess. It is Rousseau's saying, slightly amplified: "The man who thinks is not only a depraved animal, he is a hideous vegetable." Pantheism is another rational attempt by the world to explain that Nihilism is soon going to do it justice. But this hideous monster has already devoured all that soul's entrails without its being aware of the fact.

This is readily proved in reading Tolstoy's private letters written between 1851 and 1857, and embodied under the title of *Infancy, Adolescence and Youth.* It is the diary of an intelligence coming to life, and gives us all the secrets which moulded his ethics. The author applies to his own conscience that penetrating and inexorable analysis which he later on parades before Society in general. He takes hold of himself before he reaches out to take hold of others. It is a strange book, long, and at times uninteresting. Dickens is brief compared with this Russian writer. In his account of the most ordinary journey from the country to Moscow, Tolstoy counts the revolutions of the wheel, and does not let a single passer-by or a milepost escape us. But this unhealthy and irksome kind of observation, when dealing with trivial matters, becomes a marvellous instrument when it is applied to the soul and calls itself psychology. He projects his rays of light into every part of his innermost soul without any consideration for his own pride. The man sees himself and paints himself ugly, with all his foolish vanities, his ingratitude and his childish, morose distrust. We shall come across this "child" again in the principal characters

of the greater novels and shall find him unchanged. I will quote two passages which will show us Nihilism at its source in a sixteen years old brain—

"Scepticism was of all the philosophies the one which attracted me most, and for a long while it brought me into a state bordering on madness. I believed that outside myself there existed nobody in the world, that all things were nothing, mere vain apparitions evoked by my fancy at the moment my attention was drawn to them, and that they vanished the instant they passed out of my mind. . . . There were moments, when under the influence of this obsession, I reached such a point of frenzy that I occasionally turned quickly round, looking behind me in the hope of seeing "nothing" where I had ceased to be! My feeble spirit, not being capable of penetrating the impenetrable in this painful research, lost, one by one, the certainties which for my happiness' sake I never dared to approach. All these intellectual labours led to nothing, beyond an agility of mind which weakened the strength of my will, and the acquiring of the habit of incessant analyzing which took away all the freshness of feeling and clearness of judgment. . . ."

This might well be an old cry from Germany by some disciple of Schelling. Amiel does not express himself differently. But listen to what follows—for it is a real Russian who speaks for himself and for all his brethren—

"When I remember my adolescence and the state of mind I was then in, I can well understand the most objectless atrocious crimes being committed, without any intention of hurting, but *just happening*, out of curiosity, by a mere unconscious need for action. There are moments when the future presents itself to man in colours so dark that the mind refuses to contemplate and to dwell on it, and when he voluntarily and totally suspends the exercise of reason and forces himself to believe that there is no future, and that there is no past. On those occasions, when

thought no longer controls the impulses of the will, and when the physical instincts are the only remaining mainsprings of life—I see before me the inexperienced child, who without hesitation and without fear, with a smile of curiosity, lights and blows into flame the house in which he himself lives, and his brothers, father, mother, all that he loves best. Under the influence of this temporary eclipse of the mind—I nearly said of this absent-mindedness—a young peasant of seventeen looks at the newly-sharpened cutting edge of an axe lying under the bench on which his old father is sleeping. Suddenly he brandishes the axe, and stares stupidly at the blood under the bed, flowing from the stricken head. It is the same state of mind of a man who finds a delight in leaning over a precipice and saying to himself, 'Shall I take a header?' or another who places the muzzle of a pistol to his forehead and says, 'Shall I press the trigger?' or another who wishes to insult some person of high degree, respected by every one, thinks of going up to him to seize him by the nose and say, 'Well, old chap, are you coming?'"

All mere childishness, every one will say. Certainly, to our better controlled brains, in which these nightmare larvæ never come into activity, but not to the Russian brains, where such symptoms of folly are frequently followed by a corresponding act. Turgeneff in his *Madman*, and Dostoyevsky in many of his novels, have already made us acquainted with this peculiar national disease. The *House of the Dead* shows us many cases identical with those cited by Tolstoy. Nothing can better distinguish these writers, so different in themselves, than when they meet on the common ground of this chapter, and lay themselves out to ascribe this mental disturbance to that untranslatable word *ochainiye*. A dictionary will show you that its equivalent is "despair"; but the dictionary is a poor money changer at any time, and never gives the exact value, handing over the foreign coins in

return for yours without reference to their own intrinsic fiscal value. As a matter of fact, to give that word its true value, one ought to smelt down twenty others, such as : despair, fatalism, savagery, asceticism and what not. A certain strain of melancholy and madness, a strain of the drunken conscript who goes singing to join his regiment, with tears under his eyelids ! This *ochainiye* is the sentiment of unique origin which drives young girls, according to the circumstances of the moment, to commit suicide or to ambulance work, to the cloister or to active propaganda, to commit murder or to riotous living. It is the spirit which makes the quietest student an accessory before the act of murder, and sends the good-for-nothing young postillion who drives his troika at night at break-neck speed into bogs, intoxicated with the desire to go quickly into unknown dangers. Possibly it was the name that ought to be given to Hamlet's illness which led him to pass his sword, with a joke, through the body of his mistress's father.

It is the allurement and the terror of the country where reigns sheer madness, where the excesses of life are preferred, where everything can be borne except the average lot, where the people, for choice, desire annihilation rather than moderation. Poor Russia ! It is thy soul of the sea-gull, light on wing in storm and tempest, at home on the abysmal depths of the ocean !

Nihilism and pessimism—is there any necessity for two words, and can one be used without the other ?—from this time on, inspire all Tolstoy's productions, from the small stories with which he begins down to his longer and grander works. One of the former is named *The Happiness of Family Life.* It is a fine study of the degradation of the sentiment of love to that of friendship only, as experienced by a married couple. The commencement is long and slow, but in the end, owing to the truthfulness and the simplicity of the scene, by the mere

representation of their daily lives without a single romantic incident, it leaves a poignant impression of melancholy. If this story were translated [1] the French public would no doubt mistake it for the work of one of those juvenile authors, who, in these days, have taken up the task of instructing it regarding the disenchantments of life. It would be surprised to learn that this simple and sad exposition of middle-class realistic life was conceived in Russia some thirty years ago. Tolstoy employed the methods of realism, ever since his first attempt, with the same harshness as they are known to us. There are so many proofs of this statement that it is difficult to make a choice, but I will give one instance. *Infancy, Adolescence, Youth,* contains the tragic scene of his mother's death, and describes how the stench from the corpse drives him away from taking his place at the coffin. Again, there is the description of the servant's bedroom, which at first sight might well be compared with some of the best pages in naturalistic literature. But there is just one point where the comparison falls short, and that is the absence of marked coarseness. In this respect Tolstoy is wanting. But I am going into details which will come under notice again further on. I shall first deal with the writers' two best works, in which he shows us his best gifts and all his ideas. We arrive at the time where his whole talent, till now spent in studies and short stories, is concentrated in a supreme effort.

II

War and Peace shows us Russian society at the time of the Napoleonic wars between 1805 and 1815. Is it right to call this great work a novel? If so, it would seem necessary, perhaps, to ask our forefathers to alter the name

[1] Since writing, a translation has appeared under the title of *Katia.*

they have given to such encyclopedic productions. *War and Peace* is a summary of all that the author has observed regarding human nature. All the interminable series of episodes, portraits and reflections, centre round a few fictitious characters, but the real hero of this epic is Russia herself, engaged in a desperate struggle against the foreigner. The historic figures, such as Alexander, Napoleon, Kutuzoff, and Speransky, are almost as important as the fictitious characters. The thread of the story is simple enough, and loose as regards its romance, but it serves to string together tightly pell-mell chapters of history, politics and philosophy, thus forming a veritable polygraphy of the Russian people.

Try to conceive Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, recast by the ant-like elaborate labour of a Dickens, and reconstructed by the cold and finniky steel pen of a Stendhal; you may then, perhaps, obtain an idea as to the general arrangement of this book, and realize it as a unique alliance between the grand spirit of an epic and that of minute analysis. I have been told that Meissonier had once thought of painting a panorama. I do not know if the attempt was ever made, but I can well believe that it would have furnished me with a good object of comparison wherewith to elucidate the double nature of Tolstoy's work.

Its enjoyment has to be paid for at the same cost as that of a mountain ascent. The path is sometimes unpleasant and rough, one can easily lose one's way, and it requires effort and trouble. But when the top is reached, and the view shows us the whole country opened out beneath one, the reward is magnificent. No one who has not reached the summit will know the exact features of the land, the course its rivers take and the true positions of the towns. In the same way the foreigner who has not read Tolstoy flatters himself in vain if he thinks that he knows Russia of the nineteenth century; and the man

who wishes to write the history of that country, were he able to press into his service all the existing archives, would yet be flat and monotonous in his work if he neglected to consult this inexhaustible catalogue of the Russian national life.

Moreover, it may be that those who are chiefly interested in history will object to the mass of characters and the commonplace incidents that encumber its pages. It will be the same for those who only look to a novel to give them a momentary diversion. But Tolstoy will lead such out of their habitual grooves.

This circumstantial analysis ignores or disdains the first principle of analysis which comes so naturally to the French genius. We expect the romancer to select some particular person, or a fact from among the chaos of individuals and things in general, and make a careful study of the object of his choice. The Russian, dominated by the desire of subordinating all detail to the general idea, prefers not to disconnect the thousand and one bonds that cement a man or an action or a thought to the whole world; he never forgets that any one detail is connected with and dependent on the whole. Place a man of the Latin race and a Slav before a telescope. The former will adjust it, that is to say, he intentionally reduces the field of vision for the purpose of seeing something more distinctly. The other pulls out the telescope to its full length, and enlarges the horizon; but, though seeing further, renders everything indistinct.

Tolstoy, in a certain passage of *Anna Karenina*, clearly defines these different methods eternally at work between these two kinds of minds, and the attraction one has for the other. Levin, the dreamer, meets one of his friends who has a methodical turn of mind. "Levin thought that the exactness of Katavasoff's conceptions came from a want of intelligence on the part of his friend. Katavasoff thought that Levin's incoherence of ideas came from

a want of mental training. But Katavasoff's clearness pleased Levin, and the richness of one of Levin's undisciplined thoughts gave pleasure to the former." These lines compress all the reproaches made by the Russians against our genius, and all ours against theirs. It also explains the pleasure the two races find in their literary exchanges.

It is easy to predict what successive sensations our readers will experience when perusing *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina.* I have seen their influence, always the same, in all those who have tasted of these books. At first and for a long time afterwards, the reader will be bewildered and at a loss to know whither he is being led. He will soon feel rather tired, even bored. Little by little, however, he will be carried away by the complexity of all the interests involved. He will soon get to know the characters, he will welcome his friends and become excited as to their fate. On closing the book he will feel really sorry at having to part from them, as if leaving an adopted family with whom he had lived together for years. The book gives a faithful picture of life, and affords the experiences of a traveller thrown into new social surroundings. At first doubt and boredom, then curiosity, ending with long endeared recollections.

I think the difference between the classic writers and the men who, like Tolstoy, scrupulously adhere to the actual methods in real life, is this. A book is like a drawing-room filled with unknown people. Either some responsible person introduces you and in a trice unfolds to your view the thousand and one threads of intrigue that cross and traverse it; or, secondly, you have to present yourself by your own efforts and take note, as usual, of the most remarkable people, and yourself unravel the different relationships in which these people stand to each other and their several interests—in fact, live in this fictitious company just as you are accustomed to do

among real people. To judge the respective merits of these two methods, we have to address ourselves to one of the fundamental laws which govern our temperament and ask : Is a great pleasure obtainable without a little trouble ? Does one prefer what one has obtained oneself, with some effort? Think it over and answer. Whatever we each of us may decide as being the best way of these two methods for obtaining intellectual pleasure, I think we may be all agreed on one point, namely, that in our old literary paths, even mediocrity is tolerable, and an author who knows his business can always amuse. In the new paths, partial success is intolerable. It needs the drama as conceived by Shakespeare, and the novel as written by Tolstoy, to give us a real and true impression of the majesty of the high road of life.

War and Peace gives us all this. The method approved of, success is established. On seeing these camps, these soldiers, this court, these drawing-rooms, which take their tone from the court, and which have not changed for half a century—on meeting the hearts of men who never change, I recognize them all, and at each page I say to myself, " How true it all is." As we proceed, curiosity changes into astonishment, astonishment into admiration before that calm judge, who summons before his tribunal all human actions and compels the soul to give up all its secrets. One feels oneself carried away by the current of a tranquil stream, whose bottom is beyond our reach. It is life that is passing, tossing the hearts of men to and fro, and suddenly to be stripped naked by truth and the intricacies of their own deeds.

Among all social phenomena, there is one which specially attracts the attention of the romancer and the philosopher, and that is—War. Tolstoy is haunted by its mystery. He incessantly moves from the general's councils to the soldiers' bivouac, and scrutinizes the moral state of each man, the reason for the giving of an order, for its obedience,

and the sacrifices it entails. From the very commencement, by clever device, he gives us a view of the entire Russian Army. That retreating, disordered army presses across the bridge at Braynau. One of the characters in the novel standing in the crowd views the filing past—as it is technically called—and notes all the details. I only know of this chapter as one worthy of being compared to the admirable description of the "Camp of Wallenstein." When one comes to the first skirmish, hears the first shot, sees the first soldier fall, one remembers this solemn moment and feels its pang for a long while to come.

And the Imperial battles roll on before us, right through the many volumes: Austerlitz, Friedland, Borodino. These are not what are generally called "Battle Scenes." Oh! no! Tolstoy writes of war as a man who has gone through it. He knows no battle can be *seen* by one man. Often he suspends the recital to pull up Thiers and gently rally that artist for his agreeable compositions. His method is the one inaugurated by Stendhal in the Waterloo of the *Chartreuse of Parma*. Like the young Fabrice del Dongo (in that story), the Russian general, Comte de Bezushoff, strays into the central redoubt at Borodino and naïvely seeks the battle. The soldier, the officer, even the general, whom the author puts on the scene, themselves never see but one particular part of the struggle. But from the way they fight, think, speak and die at that given point we can guess all the rest of the action, and to which side victory inclines. When Tolstoy wishes to give us a general description of the whole, he legitimizes it by some artifice. Thus, in the affair at Schöngraben, he makes us follow an aide-de-camp carrying an order all along the engaged lines.

After this same affair, the corps commanders submit their reports. They do not refer to what has happened, but to what *ought* to have happened. Why? "The colonel had such a strong wish to perform this movement, and

regretted so much that he had not been able to perform it, that he was under the impression that everything had actually been carried out as he had desired. And possibly, in truth, that had really come to pass! Is it never possible in this confusion to be able to distinguish between what has happened and has not happened?" Ironical, but true! as all who have been on active service will no doubt corroborate, especially when listening to accounts witnessed by others.

Do not expect from this realistic writer the usual classical conventionalities, such as an army breathing out heroism, following the example of their chiefs, living only for the consummation of the great things in view. Tolstoy believes in the realities and the actual facts of life. He sees every soldier performing heroic acts as a matter of course, as part of his professional duty, though often occupied with details and trivialities; the officers absorbed with their amusements, their chances of promotion; the generals with their ambitions and intrigues; all of them accustomed and indifferent to what appears to us extraordinary and "grandiose." Nevertheless, by its very simple truthfulness, the writer draws tears from our eyes in honour of these self-ignoring heroes, as, for instance, in the case of that lovable character Captain Tushino, a brother to Captain Renault in *Servitude and Military Splendour*. Tolstoy is severe on the leaders. He places vividly before us the councils of war, as taken from the records of the day. He jeers at the French and German strategists who surround Alexander; and lets his notorious Nihilism have full swing when describing this babel of languages and opinions.

A General Kutuzoff is the one man for whom he has a sneaking sympathy. Do we know why? The idea is thoroughly Russian! Because he gave no orders, cared for no plans, and slept during the council meetings, trusting entirely to luck! All his comments on military action

point to the same idea, and are further developed in the philosophical appendix attached to the novel, purporting to show that all generalship is vain and useless; that everything is dependent on the fortuitous actions of the smaller units; that the only decisive factor is the dash at the unforeseen moment, which at certain moments raises this wavering mass of armed men into a gallant army. What about "dispositions" for the battle? Who really takes account of this on the battlefield, and the thousand and one possible ways of drawing up the men! And what about the *coup d'œil* of a genius? But even genius cannot see through smoke; and the information he receives and the orders he gives are always too late! And the leader who inspires the troops? He inspires ten, fifty, perhaps a hundred men within a space of a few yards, and the rest of the army the next morning—in his dispatches! Directing the three hundred thousand men murdering each other on the plain of Borodino, to victory or defeat—is only the wind of Fate!—Here we see the true mysticism of the Nihilist, the same we shall invariably find in his dealings with all problems of life.

After the war, Tolstoy finds the greatest pleasure in actively studying the intrigues in the higher spheres of society and the court—its centre of gravity. Inasmuch as the racial differences and distinctions disappear as one becomes more cultivated, the novelist now leaves the purely Russian types and creates types of human beings more universally met with and which will last for ever.

Since the days of Saint-Simon nobody has so cunningly exposed the "mechanism" of a court as did that observer of Versailles. Whenever the fiction writers enter those sacred precincts we generally refuse to believe them. From the thousand false notes heard we guess at once that they have listened at the doors and peeped through the keyhole. The superiority of our Russian author lies in the fact that there he moves in his natural element, for he has had

practical experience of court life as he has had of the army. He speaks of his equals in their own language, with the same advantages of education. Hence the abundant and certain information, just like that of the comedian who divulges the secrets of the boards. Enter, for instance, the drawing-room of the old lady-in-waiting, Anna Schérer. Listen also to the small talk of the "emigrants"—the nationalized foreigners—to the criticism about Bonaparte, to the manœuvrings of the courtiers and the "accents of respectful dulness" with which the names of the members of the Imperial family are pronounced. Sit down and hark to Speransky at his writing-table in his inner sanctum, "laughing as if on the stage." Follow in the wake of the Sovereign entering the ball-room, at the moment the dawn shines on every face as at the sun's appearing. Especially draw near the death-bed of the old Count Bezushoff, and behold the tragedies at play behind the masks demanded by convention; the factions of private interest at work around the dying man unable to speak, and note the generally disturbed state of all those minds. Here the dark shades, as elsewhere the high lights, give an unequalled force to the simplicity and truthfulness of the scene, and support the contention that he knew well the ways of this social world and its manner of life.

One ought to read all the passages where the Emperors Napoleon and Alexander are made to speak. It will then be understood how much room there is in the Russian mind for Nihilism, and its refusal to accord to the dignities that attitude of respect made sacred by common consent. The author's manner of writing is quite deferential, and it is impossible to accuse him of belittling the majesty of Authority; only by ably handling its unreasonable details does he destroy it.

Napoleon is shown in ten or twelve portraits executed with minute care; without a trace of animosity or a word of caricature. Nevertheless, from a touch here and there

in the text this prodigy is seen to crumble. Generally it is a detail, cleverly glossed, in his personal appearance, which makes it incompatible with the wielding of the sceptre and the wearing of Imperial robes.—At Tilsit, Napoleon decorates a Russian grenadier, chosen haphazard by the colonel of the regiment, with the Cross of the Legion of Honour. The Emperor takes the cross from off the cushion held out to him " with a small, podgy hand." On the eve of Borodino he is shown us dressing. Fabvier makes his report as to the number of prisoners taken during the day, whilst " a valet is sponging his fat body." When dealing with Napoleon, Tolstoy does not shrink from taking considerable liberties, but it is curious to see his method when it is applied to his own sovereign. Here we find him taking infinite precautions, adhering strictly to the proprieties, and yet the deception is equally well kept up by accentuating the differences between the acts of the mortal man and the august rôle he has to play. Here is one instance among a hundred.

Alexander is at Moscow. He receives the ovations of his people in the Kremlin in 1812, at the solemn hour when the Holy War is proclaimed.

" After the Tsar has dined, the Master of Ceremonies, looking out of the window, said:

" ' The people are still anxious to behold your Majesty.'

" The Emperor rises, munching a biscuit, and steps out on to the balcony. The people rush up close to the terrace.

" ' Our Angel! Our Father! Hurrah!' shouts the crowd. And once again the feebler among the men and women begin to shed tears of happiness. A large-sized piece of the biscuit he held in his hand fell on to the balcony, and thence on to the ground. A man standing in front of the crowd, a coachman wearing a blouse, threw himself on the piece of biscuit and picked it up. Others pressed round the coachman. Seeing this, the Emperor called for

a plate of biscuits, and threw them one by one among the people. . . . The blood had rushed to Peter's head, the risk of being crushed to death caused him the greatest anxiety, but he nevertheless ran forward. He did not know why, but he felt he must gather the crumb that fell from the hand of the Tsar. . . ."

In the same way nothing can be more realistic than the account of the audience given at Brünn by the Austrian Emperor to Bolkonsky, when bringing the news of a victory by the Allies. What a clever study that is of the young officer's disillusion, when he sees *his* battle in the opinion of others dwindle down to nothing! He left the battlefield as in a trance; he is going to stir the world with the account of the exploit he is on his way to retail. But, arrived at Brünn, his dream is drenched in a bucket of cold water! First the Minister of War's aide-de-camp is "so polite," then the Chamberlain, the diplomatic Bilibin, then, lastly, the Emperor, who after absent-mindedly asking a few of the ordinary questions suitable to the occasion, asks where "the place" was, and ends with the customary commonplace compliments. He leaves the Presence, and, after having taken the measure of his own concern, from the point of view of other men as dictated by their own individual interests, this poor Bolkonsky looks to find what there is left of *his* battle. He finds it mighty small and shoved well into the past.

"André realized that all the happiness and interest born within him by that victory had been effaced and cast behind him, that he had delivered them into the hands of an unconcerned Minister of War, and an aide-de-camp 'so polite.' All his ideas had now readjusted themselves. The battle appeared to him as no more than an ancient and distant memory."

These changes of impression on the minds of men as affected by their immediate surroundings is a special characteristic of Tolstoy's. He devotes particular attention to

them. He delights in placing his characters into successive and diverse moral atmospheres; now in a regiment, then in the country, and shows us the corresponding mental mutations. When the party, after having for some length of time been dominated by some strange ideas and passions, resumes his normal habits, his view of things is made to change forthwith. Follow, for instance, the young Nicolas Rostoff first returning from the army to join his family hearth, and then again on his way back to rejoin his squadron of hussars. It is no longer the same man—he has two distinct souls ready for an exchange. In the post-cart which takes him to Moscow, or which carries him away, we see him gradually despoiling or repossessing himself of his professional spirit.

I have no desire to multiply the examples of these special psychological changes, always in evidence, for I think I have said enough to indicate the principal characteristic of Tolstoy's genius. He amuses himself by demonstrating the existence of a Jack-in-the-box in every man. An unknown person enters a drawing-room. The author notes and details his looks, his voice, his bearing, he brings us to the very innermost recesses of that man's soul. He dissects the least glance of the eye or the looks exchanged between two people, finding in them love, fear or superciliousness, or an air of superiority, as the case may be. Never weak, this doctor, at every minute, feels the pulse of every passer-by and calmly registers the state of their moral nature. His method is objective. It is seldom that, on introducing us to one of his creations, he says : " This is a dissipated fellow, or a gambler, or ambitious," but he makes him act and speak according to the type chosen, in such a manner that he at once gives himself away. Thus the old Count Rostoff. We are not told that he is a spendthrift, but, after having read of his financial embarrassments, and then hearing him ask his agent for new loans, we have no doubt about his character.

This fundamental precept of the classic art has been rediscovered by the realistic writers, whose sole anxiety is to be true to life. It enables us to guess the characters by their habitual actions, without the necessity of giving us any dissertation as to their qualities.

There is a great deal of skill in this seeming chaos and room for plenty of choice among this formidable accumulation of detail. Observe how Tolstoy takes good care to keep the characters always before our eyes, whether during a conversation or in any episode, by noting their gestures, or any tricks, and how he breaks off in the middle of their sentences to tell us the direction in which they are looking. All this keeps the scene perpetually before us.

There is the same ability in the serious style he adopts, for he never smiles. Not the ability, as we understand it, of sallies and sparkliness, the shock of the unexpected contrast, but what Pascal calls the spirit of 'finesse,' the perception which takes in the most subtle hint and makes the most delicate distinctions. I just refer to a few instances taken at random. After a long stay in the country Bolkonsky re-enters the vortex of social St. Petersburg: "He did nothing; thought of nothing and had not the time to think; but his talk was much appreciated, for when he spoke he was dispensing the reserves of thought he had found leisure to accumulate whilst in the country."

Again. Prince Andrew is introduced to Speransky: "He looked at the Minister's hands. One involuntarily looks at the hands of the man who holds the power." And once more:

"Bilibin's face was corrugated with deep wrinkles, which looked as if they had been carefully and thoroughly washed, so much so that they reminded one of the tips of one's fingers after a bath."

The Moscow aristocracy gives a dinner at the English Club in honour of Bagration. "These three hundred people

sat down at table in order of precedence, the more important near the honoured guest; this was done quite naturally, just as water finds its own level and is deepest where the ground is lowest."—" Oblonsky liked to read his newspaper in the same way as he smoked his cigar after dinner, enjoying the haze that floated into his brain."

III

Among the mass of people that appear in this lengthy tale, *War and Peace*, there are two leading characters round which the entire plot, or rather the successive plots, of the novel centres. These are the Prince Andrew Bolkonsky and the Count Peter Bezushoff. They are two invaluable types worth a moment's attention. Tolstoy makes them reflect the double aspect of his own soul and that of Russia, as also all the thoughts and contradictions that torment him. Prince Andrew is the refined gentleman and aristocrat, looking down upon and despising the life around him. He is proud, cold, sceptical, even atheistic, yet spends many solemn hours pondering anxiously over the greater problems of life. His is the part to express the author's opinions on the historic characters of the day, and who sees through the statesmen and all their intrigues. Seeing him inspecting the general staff offices and lounging through the salons of St. Petersburg, with his irreproachable and correct deportment and his cosmopolitan education, he would pass for a real European. But wait!

Andrew is received by Speransky. The inconceivable good fortune this seminarist had is well known. He was a kind of Sieyès whose destiny it was to endow Russia with a constitution, and for some time to govern the empire in the name of pure reason and theological syllogisms.

" The chief thing about Speransky that attracted Prince Andrew was his absolute and immovable faith in the power

and rectitude of reason. It is evident that Speransky's brain could never have entertained the idea—one so familiar to Prince Andrew—that it is difficult to formulate exactly what one thinks. Never, for instance, could the following doubt have entered his mind: 'All I think, all I believe, is it anything else but an absurdity?' And that mental attitude, so *exceptional* in a statesman, is exactly what made him so sympathetic to Andrew."—Here we have once more the lurking nihilist who suddenly, for want of "certainty," flies for refuge to his "nothingness." The above observation was correct, and explains the ascendency Speransky had over his sovereign and country, and in a more general way the attraction the "positif" European spirit has for irresolute minds.

Severely wounded at Austerlitz, we see Andrew lying stretched out on the field of battle, with eyes fixed, staring at the sky—"That distant sky, on high, eternal." I cannot give the whole passage, but listen to the cry of the moribund: "If I only could say, 'Lord have mercy upon me! . . . But who shall I say it to? Either to an Indefinite Power, who is inaccessible, whom I cannot even define in words; the Great All or the Great Nothing—or is it the God which is contained in this charm given me by Mary? . . . Nothing, nothing is certain except the nothingness of everything I can conceive and the majesty of something I cannot understand!"

Peter Bezushoff has a more human character, but his intelligence is of the same mystic order. This huge lymphatic mass of humanity, absent-minded, blushing or crying easily, always ready to plunge deeply into any love affair, of unbounded sympathy for all sufferings—is just the Russian nobleman, a machine made of nerves, but without the will for controlling them. A perpetual prey to all new ideas; and yet that thick envelope holds the subtle, mystic soul of a Hindu.

One day Peter has given his friend Andrew his word of

honour that he will not take part in a certain orgie arranged for by some youngsters. The evening arrives and he hesitates. "In the end he opines that all such 'words of honour' are mere conventionalities, having no particular, definite sense, especially if one begins to think—that to-morrow I might be dead, or such and such an unexpected thing might happen by reason of which there would be no more honour or dishonour.' Such reflections, destructive of all good resolutions and plans, often entered Peter's mind."

Tolstoy has cleverly made use of this weak nature—like a photographic plate sensitized for any exposure—which might enable us to understand the larger currents of thought which traverse the Russia of Alexander I, for these frequently carry off this docile disciple in various directions. In Bezushoff's mind we see the gradual development of the Liberal movement in the first years of that reign, followed by the masonic and theosophic follies of later years. Then it is still Peter who personifies the Russian popular sentiments of 1812—rebellion against the foreigner, the madness which took hold of Moscow vanquished, and gave rise to that act of incendiarism never up till now explained, the flames of which were lit by hands to be for ever unknown. This mad incident is the culminating point of the book.

The impenetrable attitude of Rostopchin, the sacrificing of Vereshagin to the masses, the madmen and convicts in the city, the entry of the French into the Kremlin, the mysterious fire that arose during the night, and when realized was emphasized by the long columns of refugees crowding the streets—and many other scenes of tragic grandeur, are all simply told, in dark colours. I whisper the fact that I know of nothing better in any literature.

Count Peter remains in the burning city, and runs out of his palace like a madman, dressed like a peasant, and mingles with the crowd. He goes blindly forward with the

idea of putting Napoleon to death and thus becoming a martyr, a propitiatory victim for his people: "Two equally strong and invincible forces within him led to this inflexible design. The first was the necessity of sacrificing himself and of sharing the common lot of suffering, the same empirical necessity which at Borodino placed him in the forefront of the fight, and now drove him out of his own house, away from his wonted luxury and pleasant life, and compelled him to rough it day and night, and to share coarse food with Gerasim the doorkeeper. The second was the indefinable feeling—an exclusively Russian sentiment—of contempt for all that was conventional, artificial, or human, for all that which by most men is considered the best the world has to offer. Peter had realized this strange and exalted sentiment for the first time on the day of his flight, when he suddenly felt that riches, power, life in general, all that which men seek after with so much effort—that all were worth nothing, or at most were only of value because of the voluptuous feeling they gave when sacrificing all one's possessions."

Page after page the author devotes to developing this state of mind, which we have already noticed is even to be found in his early writings, and is no less than a hymn to Nirvana sung exactly the same way in Ceylon or in Thibet. It must be admitted that Peter Bezushoff is the elder brother of those grand and wise beings who one day will "go among the people," willing to share their sufferings, carrying dynamite bombs under their cloaks—just as Peter now carries a dagger under his, moved by the double design of first taking his share of the universal sufferings, then annihilating all others, and himself last.

Bezushoff, a prisoner of the French, meets among the comrades of his misfortune an old soldier, Plato Karatayeff, a gloomy and unintelligent peasant. This man endures the misery of these terrible days with the resignation of a beast of burden. He looks at Peter with an innocent grin

and says a few simple words, repeating mere popular proverbs having a vague reference to resignation, brotherly love and especially to fatalism. One evening, as he is incapable of marching any further, a file of soldiers shoot him under a pine tree, in the snow. The man meets his death with the usual indifference he had for everything—like a sick dog or, let us say the word frankly, like a brute.

From this incident dates a revolution in Peter's soul. I have but little hope of making my countrymen understand what takes place, so I just state the facts. Bezushoff, the aristocrat, the civilized, the intelligent, places himself at the feet of that primitive creature. He has at last found his ideal of life and the reasonable explanation of the world, in this simpleton. He cherishes the memory and the name of Karatayeff as a talisman. Ever after he has but to remember this humble mujik to become satisfied, happy, disposed to understand everything and to love all creation. The intellectual education of our philosopher is achieved, he has attained unto the Supreme Avatar, that is, Mystic Indifference.

When Tolstoy wrote this episode, some twenty-five years ago, we wondered if he had the presentiment that the day would come when he, too, would find his Karatayeff, that he, too, would pass through a similar crisis, and voluntarily place himself in the same way of learning, with the object of coming forth regenerated? We shall presently see how he has indeed foreseen his own case. Let us take it as proved, however, that Tolstoy, in this singular chapter—in full agreement with Dostoyevsky—definitely establishes the ideal of nearly all Russian contemporary literature.

Karatayeff's name is legion. Under diverse names and forms this vegetable existence will be held up for our admiration by each. We learn from them that the last word of human wisdom is the sanctification, the deification of the elementary brute, in other respects quite good and brotherly. The root of the idea is as follows: The

civilized man is burdened with the weight of his own reason, useless in itself, because it cannot explain to him life or its object. Therefore every effort must be made to reject this reason and to return from the complex to the simple. It is this spirit which, in various forms, animates all Tolstoy's works. He has collected in one volume some pedagogical doctrines on popular education. Its prevailing idea is summed up by him as follows : " I would teach all children of the people to think and to write; and it is I who should learn at their school what to write and think. We look for our ideal in front of us, whereas it is behind us. The means for realizing the ideal of harmony we all have within us is not by the development of man—on the contrary, that would be an obstacle to its realization. A healthy child, newly come into the world, completely realizes the ideal of truth, beauty and of goodness, from which he is further removed every day he lives. That same child is the nearest approach to nature's unthinking creature, whether animal or vegetable, which is the type of Eternal Truth, Beauty and Goodness."

Surely you see in this the weaving together of ideas comprising the venerable folly of Oriental asceticism, the cult of the yogi, of the immovable fakir who lives in the contemplation of his own navel ! Not far off is the good Karatayeff, " who took off his shoes slowly . . . filling the air with a disgusting acrid smell of sweat . . . squatted cross-legged, hands resting on knees, and stared fixedly at Peter. . . . "

Nor has Europe always been immune from this drastic evil. She, too, in her wanderings after asceticism, has frequently beatified the brute and perverted the parable of the " simple mind." But the real home of this contagious renunciation is Asia, and its original source is India, with all her doctrines. These, but slightly modified, are revived in the frenzy which plunges a part of Russia into intellectual and moral abnegation; at times but doctrines of

dull 'quietism,' at other times of sublime devotion, as in the case of Buddha the Evangelist.

Let us pass from these hardly intelligible abstractions, and say a few words about Tolstoy's women. They are near relations of Turgeneff's heroines, less emotional but perhaps with deeper natures. Two of the characters stand out prominently from among the lot. First is Mary Bolkonsky, Andrew's sister, a pious girl, devoted to alleviating the growing afflictions of her cross-grained old father. Even under the severe description given of her by the author, she appears to possess a sweet nature and a face and form dear to the old masters. Quite another sort is Natasha Rostoff, the vibrant and fascinating child, beloved by everybody, loving many, and while passing through this long and tedious work ever leaves a trace of love's perfume behind her. She is good, straight and sincere, but a slave to her tender-heartedness. It is not necessary to dwell on the consequences. Racine might have told us of Mary Bolkonsky; Abbot Prévost would have preferred Natasha Rostoff. Engaged to Prince Andrew, the one man she really loves, Natasha becomes madly infatuated with the reprobate Kuragin. Undeceived in time, filled with sad despair, she seeks and finds Andrew, now mortally wounded, and nurses him.

All this is written in a genial spirit, exactly true to nature, with all its sudden changes. Here, too, everything unites in making the most of romance by the fervour of the interests at stake and the intimate knowledge of love affairs. After Andrew's death Natasha ends by marrying the gallant Peter, who is secretly in love with her.

French readers will no doubt shrink back in horror at such sudden quick-changes of love. But it is so in life, and Tolstoy sacrifices all conventionalities if they stand in the way of truth. Don't imagine, however, that he is in search of the fanciful. After all, the girl's tergiversations end in conjugal happiness and the solid joys of a home.

The Russian devotes many pages to them, perhaps too many for our liking. He himself prefers the cult of the family and legitimate affections, and the sentiments which are outside this he looks upon as being exceptional evils, which must be exposed in detail without showing any sympathy for them. It is in this way that he analyses the flirtations and their consequences in high life at St. Petersburg, with an experienced pen, but with evident disgust.

Like Turgeneff, Tolstoy does not think much of the ladies at the court. The outcome of all his descriptions concerning them, from a close inspection, is that recorded by the grave President de Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Law :* " In the monarchies women have but little prudence, because, having been commanded at court merely on account of their distinguished rank, they become imbued with the spirit of license, which is about the only one tolerated there. Everybody makes use of their charms for his own advancement, and as their weakness precludes their being arrogant, they become vain instead, and always indulge in luxury." Fortunately there is nothing of this to be seen in Republics !

The tenacious writer has followed up his novel with a long philosophical appendix. He reverts, in a purely doctrinal form, to the metaphysical questions which distress him most. He expands in an unintelligible way on compulsion, autocratic arbitrariness and on the origin and essence of authority. He tells us once more that he is a fatalist. He attempts to explain power of authority as being a matter of agreement between the different parts of the body politic; which is a definition and not a solution. This appendix has not been translated into French, and with good reason—no reader would have faced that unnecessary fatigue.

Tolstoy's fault is that he wishes always to force upon us by abstract reasoning ideas which he is only gifted to place vividly before us by his plastic art. He does not realize

that, in our view, his ideas are far more clearly translated by the words and action of his characters than by any amount of argument the author is capable of.

IV

Anna Karenina is Count Tolstoy's literary testament. It occupied him many years, and portions of it appeared in a Moscow review. The work as a whole was only published in 1877, and I witnessed the sensation it created in intellectual Russia on its appearance. The writer wished to represent the society of the present day in this book just as in *War and Peace* he had represented the social conditions of former days. For one thing, the present does not belong to us as much as the past. It is too close, and it deceives us. It has not had time to settle down sufficiently to permit of its being examined from a distance of at least half a century, a point of view which is the least that is required to embrace all the great events and the great people of an epoch. The tombstones in a cemetery at the first glance appear all the same height, and in the streets—modern streets—all men look alike, for they are not sorted. Then again, the liberties Tolstoy had been able to take with the monarchs and the statesmen gone before, and the ideas now dead, could not be repeated in the case of ideas and men still living.

Neither does this second book, relating to Russian life, possess the attraction of being an epic, nor has it the same force of attraction and variety as the first. On the other hand, it approaches nearer to our literary tastes on account of the oneness of its subject, the continuity of action and the devolution of the leading characters. Our public will not find itself here so much out of its element, and will be gratified to find two suicides and one case of

adultery. But let not the Evil One rejoice too soon! Tolstoy set himself to write the most moral book that was ever written, and he has truly attained his object. The abstract hero in this book is Duty, as opposed to the panderings of the flesh. The author simultaneously unfolds a story of a being outside the regular pale of convention and that of a busy life enjoying legitimate love and a family home. Never has a preacher more effectively contrasted a picture of hell with that of—purgatory! This realistic writer is not one of those who would wish to see, or who are able to sēe, paradise in any human form or condition.

The romance of the story could not have been more beautifully conceived.

Karenin—the statesman moving in the very centre of St. Peterburg society, the same plastic character to be seen amongst us to-day—Karenin, the husband engrossed in political economy, is a favoured candidate for sharing the misfortunes of Sganarelle.[1] Vronsky, the seducer, shows himself to the last an honest fellow, devoted, ready for any sacrifice, even if the chances should be all against him. Anna is a charming woman, tender and loyal even when being led astray. To give her lapse a motive, Tolstoy does not make use of hysteria or neurotics. He disdains such cheap displays of scientific "short-cuts." This sagacious observer knows well that all our sentiments are controlled, down to the very tip of their roots, by our natural dispositions. He knows also that the conscience has contradictory laws of its own, and that it exists, for it speaks. He does not attempt to play the puerile game of explaining the impenetrable and of segregating the indissoluble. As far as it is possible he avoids using the two bastard words fabricated to disguise our ignorance of the realities, and which we call "spiritualism" and "materialism," mere futile bandying of words which

[1] One of Molière's husbands, whose devotion to his work ruined his home life.—(Tr.)

pretend to justify an alliance of what must for ever be occult.

The power of a romancer begins only with the effects of love, and I doubt if any one could have made more use of it than Tolstoy. Look at the description of Anna's troubles during the night journey between Moscow and St. Petersburg when she first realizes the true state of her heart. You will find it difficult to forget those pages. She sees Vronsky at the door of the carriage. She divines that he is following her and hears his confession thrown at her in the dark. The delicious freshness of the insidious poison begins to flow caressingly through her veins; her will gives way, and the love dream commences. The writer, following his usual custom, outlines some of the material details giving colour to the situation. The English novel that the poor woman forces herself to read, the snow-storm that beats on the window panes, the outlines of the fellow passengers, the noise and rattle of the train—all have a new and fantastic meaning. Everything seems to take part in the fight going on in her soul, between her new-born happiness and her dismay. This succession of images we can now only see through the heroine's eyes and in no other way. When, next morning, Anna steps down on to the platform where her husband is waiting, her simple remark reveals the affliction her soul has passed through. "Oh! Oh, mon Dieu! Why have his ears grown so long?" He who found that phrase knew well how to put a whole situation in one word.

From this first moment of coldness, to the last convulsion of despair which leads the unfortunate woman towards the idea of suicide, the romancer does not let go of her innermost heart, and notes its every beat. There is no need for a tragic complication to bring matters to a crisis. Anna forsakes her all to follow her lover. She has placed herself in such distressful circumstances that life becomes more and more intolerable. This explains her

final resolve. In contrast to this weird existence, the love of Kitty and Levine follows the regular course. It begins as an idyll of exquisite grace. Then comes the family, the children, and the attending joys and sorrows.

Some will say that this is but the moral and tiresome theme of the British authors ! Yes and No. The English writer almost always has a clergyman in the background, who is perpetually judging human actions according to preconceived notions, usually from the point of view of the Established Church and puritanical standards. Tolstoy allows full liberty of thought, I might even say he shows himself but lukewarm towards morality. He pursues his investigations regardless of what is convenient or inconvenient, leaving the lessons to be deduced from the harsh and bracing facts alone.

Ah ! it is not a book for girls in their teens, nor is it a book suited to a lady's boudoir where " white lies " are accepted. It is written for men, by a man who tells them what experience has taught him. These volumes may affront the laws that alone guarantee literary longevity—but when reading them, one lives.

The slightest as well as the more general of the writer's observations are reapplied to ourselves and the world around us. We compare them with his novels, and find them always corroborated. Years pass since the first time of reading them, and the marginal annotations increase in number. To them are added—as are footnotes in classical works—the comments of several generations. But all the annotator has now to write down are the words : *Confer vitam.*

Tolstoy's method and style have not altered in the least since writing *War and Peace.* He is always the clever engineer installed in a large factory, carefully inspecting the machinery, steadily acquainting himself with every part of its mechanism. He strips the engine down to the smallest screw, takes the necessary measurements, tests the

beams, and separates the pistons from the gearing machinery. He seeks in vain for the invisible motive force which escapes him. Whilst he is experimenting with the engines, we, the spectators, observe and realize that the result of all this labour amongst this material, like a delicate embroidery of infinite design—is life. Tolstoy has not modified his good points nor his faults; he misuses them both to the same extent. In *War and Peace* there is an account of a hunt with dogs that covers thirty pages. In *Anna Karenina* we are provided with a hunt in a bog —and what a bog !—where we are stuck fast for the length of thirty-three pages.

The parts describing the family life and the rural occupations would, to us in France, appear somewhat tame. The great misfortune of a certain kind of realism is that it requires a photographic representation of its surroundings before we can thoroughly appreciate its merits; and his masterpieces have this drawback. The description of the races at Tsarskoe-Selo, which charms every Russian reader, is as uninteresting to us as the detailed accounts of the Grand Prix in *Nana* would be to the Moscovite. On the other hand, the portraits given us of Oblonsky and of the minister Karenin will always retain their interest even for you, who have never seen their models, who have never heard their names whispered—because human sentiment is ever the same all the world over.

I now leave the analysis of these novels, which is hardly a favourable one. One cannot prevent the reader from traversing this labyrinth or point him out a path—he must just be allowed the pleasure of losing himself in it if so minded. But we shall find greater interest in looking closer into a criticism which will please us better. Where, for instance let us ask, is the real analogy between Tolstoy's art and French art of to-day? What are the radical differences which underlie and separate these two seemingly similar arts?

If one considers the outward appearance only, we find that Tolstoy—who has outstripped our school—has yet retained much of its spirit and of its methods. That is to say, by his use of Nihilism and pessimism as an inspiration, and naturalism, impressionism and impassiveness as the means.

Tolstoy is naturalistic, if that word has any sense, by his extreme naturalness, and by his strict method of investigation. He even carries this to excess, for he does not recoil from sordid, even coarse, details. See in *War and Peace* the account of the soldiers bathing in the pond, and the complacency with which the writer describes " that mass of human flesh, white, nude, wallowing in dirty water; the tanned under-officer . . . hairy all over. . . ." The notorious beggar of Yonville would have no call to be envious of Karatayeff, whose " greatest suffering was due to bare, scabby feet, sore to the bone. The cold was not so painful, for the swarming lice kept him warm. . . . Karatayeff's little dog was also quite content. On all sides lay the carcasses of all kinds of animals, ranging from those of men to those of horses in every state of decomposition; and as the soldiers kept off the wolves, the little dog could gorge himself at leisure. . . ."

I could quote hundreds of such examples exactly similar; I could even find some I should find it difficult to quote.

Tolstoy is an impressionist. His phrases are often so worded as to make us sense the exact effect of an action, object or a noise. For instance, the army is crossing the bridge at Braunau in disorder: " . . . in its rear followed a string of carts, soldiers, forges, soldiers, wagons, soldiers, tumbrils, soldiers and occasionally women. . . .": " A hissing sound rent the air. Nearer it came, quicker and louder, louder and quicker, still quicker and louder, and the cannon ball, as if not having done all its work, sent its splinters flying with superhuman force in every direction

and then buried itself in the ground, making the earth tremble from the force of impact. . . ." And the railway journey in *Anna Karenina*—the engine entering the station—the train gently slowing down—the . . . standstill!

And finally we note the vigorous application of the first dogma of his school—the impassiveness of the story teller. Here the Nihilistic pessimist is ultra-logical with himself. Persuaded of the vanity of all human action, the stage manager must keep cool and calm, in the state of the sober-minded man who, awakened by the breaking up of a ball at dawn, looks upon all these dancing fanatics as utterly mad; or, again, as a man who has feasted, on entering a room where people are dining, finds the mechanical movement of all those mouths grotesque. Briefly, the pessimistic writer should always remain superior to his characters, like a judge before whom stand the prisoners.

Tolstoy employs all these methods and pushes them as far as any of our own writers. Why is it then that he produces such a different effect on his readers? The secret, whatever its worth, of naturalism and impressionism is a matter of degree. What others seek after, he finds and uses. He finds room for trivialities because life is made up of them, and he wishes to handle all there is of life. But as he does not wish to burden himself with accepted facts founded on trivialities, he gives them their proper relative place, which, after all, may be of quite secondary importance in the scenes on which our attention is fixed at the moment. When passing along a street, to make a call at a house, one often comes across disgusting objects, but such an incident is rare if one is not in search of them. Tolstoy shows us exactly what is needed without raising our suspicion as to his having first swept the street and garnished the house. It is the same with impressionism. He knows that a writer may attempt to impart striking and subtle sensations, but

also that such attempts must not degenerate into a morbid habit. Above all—and it is so to his honour—Tolstoy is never obscene or unwholesome. *War and Peace* is to be found in the hands of every young girl in Russia. Anna Karenina unfolds her perilous gift as a manual in morals without a single broad incident.

Tolstoy has strong reasons for the necessity of impassiveness. Stendhal and Flaubert—I am speaking only of the dead—were but self-constituted judges of their own kind. They tell me they consider every creature worthy of their pity. But by what code of superiority? Why should I recognize these two demi-gods as ruling over me? For I know Henri Beyle. He is a consular agent who has served without much distinction and lives like his fellows, eating the same bread, suffering the same vicissitudes. On what does he rest his right to chaff me? He writes well —but what of that? So also boasts the Chinese mandarin, but that gives him no authority over my opinions. I also know Gustave Flaubert. He is an invalid, living at Rouen, well suited to instruct the middle classes. His possession of this great talent is not a proof that he can reason about things more pertinently than you or I. If I am pessimistic, I, on my side, consider these two gentlemen's literary pretensions as grotesque as the decrees of the Prince of Parma, or the would-be scientific studies of Pécuchet.

Tolstoy also looks down on his characters, and his frigidity almost borders on the ironic. But behind the marionettes he makes to dance I not only see his poor human hand, but something occult and formidable, a shadow of the ever-present Infinite—not one of those dogmas, those pseudo-definitions of the divine which my nihilism could tear to pieces. No; but I hear a dumb appeal to the Great Inaccessible, a continuous sigh regarding the fatality of Nothingness. Then that buffoonery changes its aspect and turns into a scene of Æschylus: where, in the

deeper shadows of the background, and passing above the wretched Prometheus, I behold the Power, the Strength and all the Eternally Unknown who have the sole right to sneer at man below. Before such I bend the knee.

Now turn to *Anna Karenina* and read about the death-scene of Levine's brother. I can point to the whole of that chapter with confidence—the dying agonies of Nicholas in the room of a small public-house—as one of the best works of art any literature can be proud of. Compare it with similar episodes as treated by our school of realists, some of whom are men of indisputable talent. Our novelists reduce the emotions at death to a mere physical fight. The Queen of Terror is small, dirty and uncrowned—and we repudiate her. In the Tolstoy account her grandeur is not entirely due to the accompanying religious rites, to which neither the dying man nor his brother seem to attach much importance. No, but it is chiefly due to the existence of awful doubts. Every word falling from the lips of the dying man seems to bring forth a kind of uncanny, muffled reverberation from out of the dim unknown; this phenomenon is shown us both in the simplest and in the most mysterious way. Our instincts are satisfied. However diverse our hopes and convictions may be, it is a phenomenon which tends to unite all men, and the writer blesses us without knowing it, for we feel that something august will follow behind the four rascals in black frock coats who carry us out feet foremost.

Another reason. In what category shall I place these two artists whom I know to be fully occupied with their own business affairs, this Henri Beyle Stendhal who sharpens his quips, and this Flaubert who attempts melodious periods and sonorous words and rhythms? Am I to consider them impassive magi or merely sincere realistic writers?

Tolstoy is far more logical. He deliberately sacrifices style for the purpose of removing all trace of himself in

his work. At first he was careful as to form, as evidenced in *The Cossacks* and *The Three Deaths*. Since then, however, he has of his own accord resisted that seductive temptation. Do not expect to find him using the fine language of a Turgeneff. His sole merit is the appropriateness and clearness of expression if not of the idea itself. His wording is slip-shod, and he is tiresome on account of the many reiterations. The adjectives are piled on one another anyhow, so much so that he has always to add a touch of colour to the lines with which he draws a portrait. Incidents are strung together in profusion so as not to permit the escape of the slightest thought which the idea might possibly contain. According to our light, such an absence of style is an unpardonable sign of inferiority, but to me it appears to be the inevitable consequence of the rigorous application of the realistic doctrines which profess to dispense with all conventions. Moreover, this style adds to the chance of accidentally interpolating an error between the exact description of the facts and of our way of observing them. It has to be owned, however, that this premeditated disdain of style, if it offends our predilections, yet adds considerably to the sincerity of our impressions. Tolstoy, in the words of Pascal, "has not shown us his own goodness, but ours. We perceive in ourselves the truth of what we hear, the good which we were not till then ourselves aware of, and in such a way that we cannot help loving him who made us realize it."

There is another point of difference I wish to notice between Tolstoy's ideas of realism and ours. His style primarily affects fastidious minds; those which by reason of the refinements born of education and the mask of social conventions protest against the writer's methods of observation. Such a struggle between the painter and his model makes me angry, and many others too. Whether we like it or not it is the mountain tops that first catch our eye when we look out on the world. If you once dally in the

lower depths the public will not follow you; it will then rush to the more mediocre writers of great things, whether these relate to the great moral questions—which are conspicuous everywhere and bring us back to the study of the lower orders—or to the great social questions, which exist only under privileged conditions. That public cannot be got hold of except by means of the obscene, and by placing a premium on its most bestial instincts, and we still await the naturalistic writer on popular customs and habits who cannot offend against decency. Every morning the most discreet newspapers publish for its readers detailed accounts of the goings-on of the fashionable world it will never meet. They well know that these accounts are of more interest to them than the doings in a pot-house. Like everything that has life it looks upwards. Place man before a microscope or a telescope—both magicians which can make us see marvellous things—and humanity will not hesitate; it will look up towards the stars.

I have endeavoured to describe the special characteristics by which it might, by some, seem possible that Tolstoy could be placed in one of the orthodox categories invented by our rhetoricians. But as a matter of fact I know well that he escapes them as he does me. All those rules are artificial and all these quarrels puerile. Because of our taste for symmetry we forge silly classifications by which to find our own place in "the chaos occasioned by the human mind made free."

So far we have only been as successful as the astronomer who inscribes the heavens in twelve signs in his small circle—on paper. When man rises above mediocrity he forthwith snaps his fingers at our compasses and measurements. He attempts to combine in ever-varying proportions the diverse recipes which we offer him to please ourselves. The universe, with its humanity, its oceans, its heavens, is before him like a harp of a thousand strings, which, so it was thought, had all been played out. A

passer-by strikes a chord, as moved by his own interpretation of the universe. His whim unites these old and well-worn strings into a new kind of harmonic combination which creates a caprice of ravishing melody, holds us for an instant, to enlarge the vague themes of human thought —that treasury of ideas on which we feast.

Count Tolstoy would feel much compassion for us, were he to learn that we were occupied in discussing his literature—for his wish is to be regarded only as a philosopher and a reformer. Let us return then to his philosophy; let us see what is the final end of his Nihilism, for it is in the contemplation of what we see in the mirror of this isolated soul that we shall learn of Russia's probable future.

I have already said that the composition of *Anna Karenina* had, off and on, occupied the author many years. The fluctuations of his own life during this time are reflected in the life of Constantine Levin, the begotten son and familiar spirit of his mind.

Levin, a fresh incarnation of Bezushoff in *War and Peace*, is the hero of modern romance, liked by Turgeneff and beloved by young maidens. He is a country gentleman, with good common sense, educated, not brilliant, a fanciful dreamer and passionately fond of country life and all the social questions it gives rise to in Russia. Levin devotes himself to these matters, he does all he can to reform and improve everything about him, and takes his part in the Liberal movements which have occupied the country the last twenty years. Naturally, his chimerical ideas crumble, one after another, and his Nihilism evolves in bitter triumph from out their ruins. But to say the least, his Nihilism is neither as painful nor as irritating as it was in his first youth nor as that of Peter Bezushoff or that of Prince Andrew. He allows the most harassing problems of the soul to slumber, in favour of the more active diversions in connection with the politico-economics of the day. Quiet

country life, with its many occupations, and the joys and sorrows of his family and home, had benumbed that serpent. The years pass by and the story goes on towards the final catastrophe.

Suddenly, successive moral shocks reawaken Levin's indifference to religious matters. His brother's death, the farce of the "confessional" he had to go through before his marriage, the birth of his child, Schopenhauer's books, all these resuscitate his mental anguish. "During the whole spring he was not himself, and went through some horrible moments. He said to himself, 'As long as I do not know what I am, and why I am here, life will be an impossibility to me. And as I cannot attain unto this knowledge, life is impossible. In the infinity of time, in the infinity of matter, in the infinity of space an organic cell is formed, lives a moment and dies. I am that cell.' This seemed to him to be barbarous sophistry, and yet it was the only and supreme result of all lay effort of human thought on that subject. It was the last article of faith, wherein all research for the solution of this problem ended."

Overwhelmed by these terrible thoughts, Levin is horror-struck, and is about to give up all hope. Then enters the "peasant saviour," the enlightening mujik. One evening, whilst turning over hay, the good fellow, Fedor, allows some aphorisms of peasant's wisdom to escape him. In the way of Karatayeff, he says, "Man must not live to himself . . . man must live for God. . . ." On hearing these words Levin has found his way to Damascus. He is touched by the Holy Spirit, and the scales fall from his eyes.—"All evil comes from the foolishness of reason, from the trickery of reason." All that is needed is to love and to believe. That is all. Every difficulty disappears, and the book ends with the development of a long intellectual drama of radiant, mystic happiness, a hymn of joyfulness in which rationalism proclaims the bankruptcy of reason. It is best suited to the ordinary prayer-book of a limited horizon. It is

the farthing dip of a rag-picker, good enough to light up the path of darkness three paces ahead, there to find the little bits of refuse which give him life. What folly if this poor wretch were to turn his ridiculous rays towards heaven, to examine by the light of his lantern the fields of night which flee from Gemini to Sagittarius![1]

V

The consolation of "quietism," revealed to mankind by a humble apostle, which forms the final apotheosis of all Tolstoy's novels, the heavens reserved also for him. He, too, was to find his Karatayeff.

After *Anna Karenina*, a new novel by the same author was awaited with impatience. Well-informed people assured us that he had undertaken the continuation of *War and Peace*, that is, a new chronicle on the interesting period of the Decembrists.[2] The literary world rejoiced in advance. But nothing appeared except a few nursery tales. One of these entitled *On what do men live?* has a delicious charm.

These stories showed a soul already weaned from mundane realities. At last it was bruited about, to the disgust of the profane, that the romancer had "smashed" his pen and definitely renounced art. He would allow no one to speak to him of his books—those vanities of the age. He now

[1] The Astronomer Royal kindly writes, on being referred to with regard to this passage—

"De Vogüé's imagery appears bold, striking and appropriate to his point. . . . Perhaps the writer had the rapid flight of time also in his mind when using the word *fuient* (fleeing). In twelve hours the fields of night flee past us from Gemini to Sagittarius; half the zodiac passes before our sight."

[2] A Russian periodical and *Le Temps* have translated the first three chapters of this novel, since abandoned by the author. It held the promise of being a work quite equal to any of the former ones.

devoted himself entirely to the good of his soul and to the higher religious problems. Count Tolstoy had on his way to Damascus met Sutayeff, the schismatic of Tver.

I will not here refer to Sutayeff's extraordinary personality, having already elsewhere published a detailed study on this gentle idealist, one of the innumerable peasants who preach the gospel of brotherhood and communism amongst the people in Russia. The teachings and example of Sutayeff had a most powerful influence on Tolstoy, so he tells us himself, for they decided him in his new vocation. It would have been inexcusable on my part to penetrate into the domain of his conscience had the romancer, now turned theologian, not himself invited us to do so. Animated by an ardent zeal for the diffusion of his " good news " he composes several works : *My Confession, My Religion,* and *A Commentary on the New Testament.*

The ecclesiastical censor has not, indeed, authorized the publication of these works, but he has passed several extracts from the pamphlet entitled *My Religion.* I have one before me now, and hundreds of them are in circulation, some having Tolstoy's autograph. I am assured that the university students, the women, even the people in the streets, copy, distribute and snatch this semi-official sermon from each other. This is sufficient proof that the Russian souls are thirsting for spiritual food. Tolstoy has expressed a wish that this pamphlet should be translated into our language. Being a critic, I have therefore every right to comment on it. Not that I am going to abuse it. Oh, no !

For us, in search of documentary evidence relating to the state of the soul, the first two only are of interest. The *Confession* does not help me at all. I know it beforehand from reading the revelations contained in *Childhood, Adolescence and Youth,* and by the very explicit confessions of Bezushoff and especially of Levin. *My Religion,* a new variation of the old and distressing moan from a human heart, is never-

theless very eloquent. I sum it up roughly thus : " I soon lost my faith in happiness. I have lived a while like everybody else, enjoying the vanities of life. I have occupied myself with literature, and, like others, I have taught that of which I knew nothing. Then the 'Sphinx' pursued me with increasing cruelty, saying 'Divine me or I devour thee.' Human science has explained nothing to me. To my eternal question—the only one which concerns me—'Why do I live?' science replied by telling me of other things for which I did not care. With only science to help me I had nothing left but to join the venerable chorus of the Sages : Solomon, Socrates, Sakya-Muni, Schopenhauer, and to repeat what they said—'Life is an absurd evil.'

" I wished to kill myself. The idea then came to me to study the majority of human beings, the so-called upper classes who, though they do not 'consecrate' themselves as we do, also labour and suffer and yet are calm and resigned with their lot in life. I believed that I had to live like that multitude and return to their simple faith. But my reason could not accommodate itself to the vitiated teachings the Church dispenses to the simple-minded. Then I applied myself earnestly to the study of these doctrines and for the purpose of separating superstition from truth."

The outcome of these studies is the doctrine submitted to our view in *My Religion*. This religion is exactly that of Sutayeff, but explained with a theological and scientific gravity to be expected from a man of culture. But that does not make it any more clear ! The Gospels receive the broadest rationalistic interpretation. Tolstoy understands the doctrines of Christ's own life to be that of the Sadducees, that is, in a collective sense prolonged from generation to generation; and the reign of God on earth by the union of all men in a " communion of saints." He denies that the New Testament mentions the resurrection of the body, or the existence of an individual soul. In this unconscious

Pantheism—a mere attempt to reconcile Christianity with Buddhism—life is considered as an indivisible unity, or one whole spirit-world of which we are but ephemeral particles. But above all, only one thing matters, that is—morality. All morality is contained in the Gospel texts, "Resist not the wrong. . . . Do not judge. . . . Do not kill. . . ." Therefore, no more tribunals, no more armies, no more prisons nor reprisals—public or private! No wars nor judgments! The law of the world is to fight for existence; the law of Christ is the sacrifice of one's life for others. The Turk or the German will not attack us if we are Christians and do them good. Happiness, the supreme end of morality, is only possible through the universal belief of all men in the doctrines of Christ, the True Doctrine—that of Tolstoy, not that of the Church—by the return to the simple life, to communism, and by the abandonment of all industries and towns, to which the doctrines of Christianity are unsuited.

In support of these dicta, the author, in the style of Bridaine, fills many pages with rare eloquence and with crude truly prophet-like imagery, describing life as viewed by the world from birth till death. That life is more terrible than that of the Christian martyrs. The Established Church is not spared. The apostle of this new faith, after having shown us how impossible it was for him to find peace in the orthodox Church, repeats the violent accusations preferred by Sutayeff against the Church—"that dead body, of no value to the regenerate." She substitutes ritual and forms for the New Testament spirit. She teaches catechisms in which it is written that man may judge, may kill in the service of the State, that others' property may be seized and injury may be resisted. Since the days of Constantine the Church has lost itself by having deviated from the doctrines of God to follow the doctrines of the world. To-day she is pagan. Lastly—and this is the tender spot—all temporal laws are to be defied as long as

they are contrary to the Truth. I now cite a typical example—

"The other day I passed the porch of Borovitsky's house in Moscow. Under the arch sat a crippled beggar with bandaged head. I pulled out my purse to give him some money. At that instant I saw a fine young grenadier, handsome in his uniform, come running towards us from the direction of the Kremlin. At the sight of the soldier, the beggar, frightened, stood up and hobbled away as fast as he could into the Alexander Gardens, at the foot of the slope. The soldier swore at him for having infringed the law by sitting down near the porch. I waited till the soldier came up to me, when I asked him if he could read.

"'Of course; why?'

"'Hast thou read the New Testament?'

"'I have read it.'

"'Hast thou read: "He who feeds the hungry"' . . . and I quoted the whole text to him. He seemed to know it, and listened to me with interest. I saw he was troubled. Two passers-by stopped to listen. Evidently the grenadier seemed quite uncomfortable because he could not contradict the fact that he had acted wrongfully whilst strictly performing his soldier's duty. He was distressed and seemed anxious to give me a satisfactory reply. All at once a light of intelligence flashed from his eyes, and, taking me aside, he said—

"'And hast thou read the military regulations?

"I confessed to not having read them.

"'Then shut up,' said the grenadier, triumphantly nodding his head as he marched off at a deliberate pace."

I think I have faithfully summed up *My Religion*, but the superb confidence which fills the hearts of all these reformers cannot be understood unless I give a literal translation of the following lines—

"Everything about me confirmed the verity of the meaning I found in the doctrines of Christ. But for a long

time I could not take to the strange idea, that after eighteen centuries, during which time millions of human beings have confessed to the Christian faith, and after thousands of people have consecrated their lives to the study of that faith, it was given to me to discover and disclose the laws of Christ as something new. But, strange as it may seem, it is so."

After that one can imagine what *A Commentary on the New Testament* would be. God keep me from troubling the peace of any convert! Fortunately I should not succeed. Tolstoy, in a hymn full of joy and happiness, with unquestioned sincerity affirms that he has at last found peace for his soul, the reason or the " why " of life and the " rock " of faith, and he invites us to follow him. I fear the hardened sceptics of the West, mostly rebels against efficacious grace, will decline to discuss this new religion, which moreover seems to become modified from time to time according to the rapidly changing views of its founder. This new gospel gradually eliminates everything that resembles a theodicy, and plans to retrieve all disregard of duty, all lost hopes, and a return to all active moral life generally; in other words, it aspires to reform all social evils by the one and only means—communism. This obsession inspires Tolstoy's latest writing which has come to my knowledge, entitled, *What is to be done?* A significant title, which has done duty many a time in Russia ever since the famous novel by Chernichevsky. It reveals the persistent mental anguish of all such men, and is truly pathetic in its ingenuousness.

What is to be done? First of all, leave the city, disband all workmen, return to the land and till it with one's own hands. Every man to have the ideal of supplying his own needs, himself. The author demonstrates the first part of his appeal, and retraces the spectacle of misery in a town, as seen by him at close quarters in Moscow. The descriptive novelist here reappears exercising his

admirable talents, employing his own special gift of looking within and scouring his innermost soul for the smallest baseness, due to our depraved natures. He observes and denounces his own weaknesses with the same delight with which we habitually discuss these in others; he lashes himself in passing as a matter of self-discipline: "I gave the wretch two half-crowns and felt good. . . . I was glad that I was seen giving them. . . . "

The second part is devoted to abstract theorizing. We cannot remedy universal misery for several reasons:

1. It is inevitable in the cities, which attract the unemployed;
2. We give the example of idleness and luxury;
3. We do not keep the laws of Christ. Charity in itself is no virtue, but brotherly division is. "Let him who has two cloaks give one to him that has none." That is what Satayeff preaches.[1]

The system of wages is an aggravated form of slavery. On account of the modern method of doing business on credit the wage-earner is not only a slave in the present but remains so for all time. After we have brought him into the towns, to work for the purpose of satisfying our luxurious fancies, charity becomes but a part-payment of the bill of exchange we have given to the peasant.

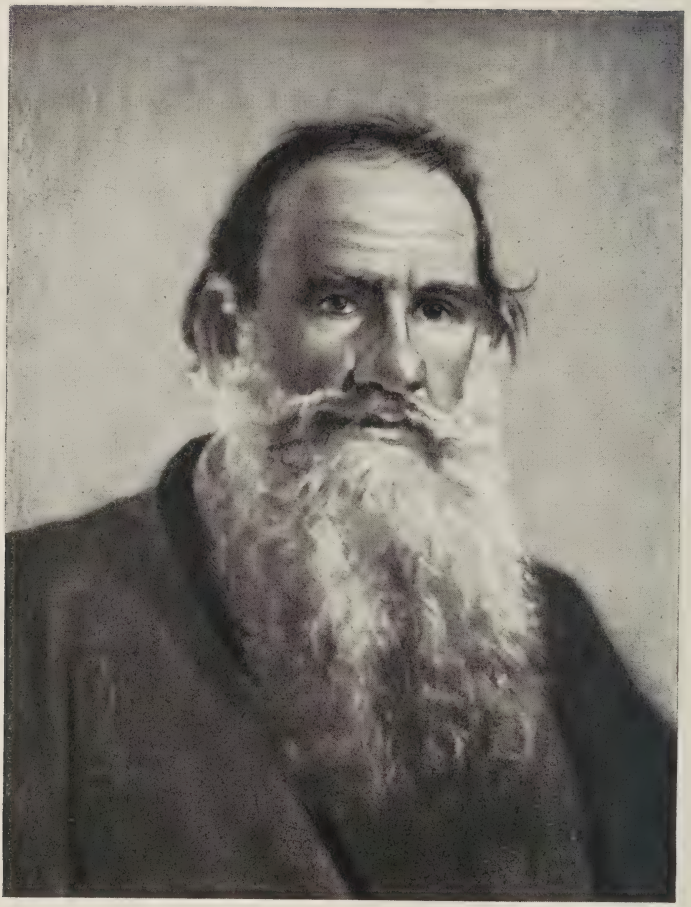
The author concludes by declaring the sole remedy to be—a return to the land, which guarantees the means of existence to every worker. He does not see that his panacea logically carries him to the more rigorous conclusion of a return to the individual existence of the brute struggling hard to find his own lair and prey as a substitute for methodical industrial labour, as that society would still be composed of wolves and sheep. Tolstoy only sees one aspect of God, that of righteousness. He forgets the divine

[1] Matt. v. 40, suggests the giving of *both*.—(Tr.)

attribute of intelligence, the obligation laid on us to develop the mind, which necessarily implies division of labour.

Nothing in all this is likely to captivate us. One can search in vain for a single original idea in the revelation presented to us by the Apostle of Tula. There is but the first babblings of rationalism amongst the religious, and of communism among the socialists. It is but the old recurring dream of the millennium of the Middle Ages as found among the Vaudois, the Lollards, and the Anabaptists. Happy Russia, where these beautiful fancies are still new ! To a Western the only matter for astonishment must be the fact of finding such doctrines revived by the pen of a great writer, and one, too, who has shown himself to be a close observer of men's hearts. Of all the eloquent pleadings of the philosopher against the " tricks " of reason, none will convince us better than the example he himself affords us ! To feel astonished, however, one must never have reflected on the necessary connection of certain ideas. Even more than nature the mind of man abhors a vacuum. He could not possibly for any length of time find an equilibrium in—nothing. In thus traversing Tolstoy's soul, and consequently the more confused consciences of the readers who follow and urge him on, we have been through the four points of a fatal curve : pantheism, nihilism, pessimism, mysticism. The Russian, who does everything impulsively, has by one bound arrived at the last.

Mysticism ! I am told that Count Tolstoy, realizing where the danger lies, energetically protests against the use of this word, as being not applicable to a man who has brought down the heavenly rule of righteousness to direct the world. But our language does not provide any other word to suit his case, and I trust the illustrious novelist will pardon me. I know he would much prefer my lauding his gospel and disparaging his novels, but I cannot. A passion-



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TOLSTOY

ate reader of the latter, I dislike his doctrines all the more for their depriving me of his masterpieces, doomed to cease.

I have not spared him my praises as long as my reason was able to follow and agree with him. To-day he is happy, and therefore no longer needs my praise, and any criticism must be indifferent to him. Is it possible that in the enjoyment of his dearly acquired quietism he will never need a friend to tell him what Fenelon, in one of his letters on religion, wrote to Madame Guyon: "I can only bewail the mysterious disease which has caused your heart to wither."

We must nevertheless concede that Tolstoy is one of those rare reformers who practise what they preach. I am assured that his influence and example are widespread and salutory, that he has performed a miracle, such as could only happen in Russia, of inducing all the people about him to return to the habits and customs of the Early Christians. Every day he receives many communications from unknown people. From tax-gatherers, functionaries and cheats—let us use the original word "publicans"—who thrust their ill-gained money on him; from young people asking for guidance, and from women sinners who implore his help and counsel. Withdrawing himself into the country, he gives freely of his goods; works and lives exactly as his own peasants. He carries water, he cuts hay, digs, and cleans boots. He flies into a rage when his novels are mentioned in his hearing. I am shown a picture of him dressed as a mujik, at work with his cobbler's awl.

Mighty workman of masterpieces, that is not your tool! Right or wrong, perhaps for our chastening, we have received from high heaven that necessary and superb misfortune—the power to think. By decree from a Higher Power, so it is said, some of us are fated to possess a greater share of this evil for the good of others. To throw away that cross is impious rebellion. Our appointed implement

is the pen; our field the human mind, which has to be tilled and nourished. Allow me to remind you of that Russian peasant's cry, that of the first printer in Moscow at the moment of his being broken on the wheel: "It is not given to me to sow the seed of wheat, but to sow the spiritual seed broadcast over the earth. . . ." Finally let a voice from Paris, where you are much beloved, recall to your memory Turgeneff's touching dying request addressed to you in his last testament, and containing a higher religion than that of Sutayeff—

"This gift comes to you whence all things come to us . . . return to your literary labours, great writer of our Russian soil!"

I do not pretend to have acquired an extended knowledge from these my first exploitations in Russian literature. I have to wait till I have completed my studies of the less remarkable writers, who also have the right to be considered as witnesses in the matter of the customs and habits of their own people.

Then, again, if a book has been successful in conveying the author's thoughts, its conclusions for the reader must be self evident. Failing in this, all further argument is of little interest and of little effect. We have seen this literature grow by artificial means. For a long while in foreign swaddling clothes, weak and servile, it was incapable of giving us any information as to its own country, which it deliberately ignored. We have seen it revive its own vital force from its own native soil, which henceforth is to supply the object of its studies. From that moment she creates and perfects the instrument appropriate to her task, namely, realism. Then, as the West still hesitates to use this same instrument, we see it applied with success to external things, and then to those of the soul. This realism is often without good taste or method, and at other

times diffuse and subtle; but it always remains natural and sincere. Above all, it is ennobled by ethical emotions, by its inherent desire to search after the things divine and by its sympathy for all mankind.

None of these novelists have any idea of writing mere literature, but are always actuated by the double desire of arriving at righteousness and truth; double in name only, one in themselves. The Russian word *pravda* stands for both righteousness and truth, or rather it implies two ideas in an indivisible one. This is a point of great importance and worthy of our deepest consideration, for language betrays the philosophic conceptions.

They are in search of religious truth because their own creeds, which pretend to give it them, do not suffice, and because the agnosticism with which we are content is opposed to all their racial instincts. Spiritual uneasiness still predominates, and is at the root of all social and political troubles in Russia.

When one enters St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg it is as if stepping into night. Badly lit from above, the imposing building is all darkness. On the doors of the chancel being opened, a flood of light descends from a great Christ painted in the window panes of the apse, whence only the church obtains her daylight. The image seems alone to illumine the night in the temple, and the visitor's eyes are involuntarily held by that face. It has not the same calm expression given it by the "Western" to the Son of Man. It is thin, emaciated, fervent, with a wild look in the eyes. It is the Slavonic Christ, betraying intense human anguish at the loss of a dream unrealized, or that of a god dissatisfied with his divinity. For him all things have not been attained, and the last word has not been spoken. It is, indeed, the face of the god of a people still groping about in darkness, and truthfully represents all their anxieties. The Slav, as a race, has not yet taken up his great part in history, and a great part played by a

race in history has always been of a religious nature. By means of discipline the Orthodox Church strives hard with equal good faith to imbue all classes of society with its own religious creed. But everywhere—in the depths of the forests or on the lonely steppes—peasants are to be met with who speak and think like the humble dissenter Sutayeff, of whom Prugavin writes:

"One evening, seated before his window, he was dreamily looking across the fields and in a voice of inexpressible feeling said: 'Oh! if only some one would point out to me where I am wrong, where I have missed the truth! I would serve him all the days of my life. . . . Verily I do not know what I would not give him.'" . . .

You can hear in this the old cry of despairing humanity! To-day, nowhere is it to be heard more frequently and more sadly than among the Russian people, which is aptly called by a great writer a "moral vagabond."—Lately, in St. Petersburg, two well-dressed men, to all appearance respectable shop assistants, went to one of those religious meetings known in Russia as those of the "Redstockists,"[1] and in the piteous tones of a beggar in the street called out to the speaker, "Make me believe!" In the darkness there are thousands who have this great holy thirst, who are seeking and crying out, like Luther in the Wartburg, "What is righteousness and where shall I find it?"

Righteousness and Truth! In this pursuit of the "Pravda," I repeat, they never separate the double ideals, the divine from the human. The creed which they wait for must realize the one and the other, both together. Not having found it, and being still a young and ingenuous nation, they are now occupied with the religious and social discussions which fascinated our Western minds in the dark ages, at the dawn of the Reformation. These same doctrines are by the Slav dressed with a fresh character, or,

[1] Lord Radstock, the Evangelist, leader of a great revival in Russia at that time.—(Tr.)

let us say, one more pronounced. It is a historic fact that no part of the human family has ever been more favoured, or received less than another of its patrimony—the ideal of righteousness and truth. That lies in every heart. But the Man of the North, steeped in the gloomy thoughts of his habitual misery, broods over it long, and in the humble homes of the Slav people, less accustomed to the compromises of civilization, there are a great number of inexperienced, ardent and tenacious natures who, feeling impatient at the slowness of progress, rush at their new chimeras regardless of all obstacles.

Besides, one realizes that at the back of the soul which the New Testament has called forth in this people there is yet the influence of the ancient Aryan spirit; and on the surface of this new spirit among the cultivated classes we see the results of the teachings of Schopenhauer and modern science. That accounts for our witnessing to-day in Russia a revival of Buddhism. I cannot give this tendency any other name, for we recognize in it the ancient controversy among the Hindus between an extremely high moral standard and the pantheistic metaphysics which spell Nihilism. This Buddhistic spirit, in its despairing efforts still further to enlarge the bounds of Christian charity, has filled the Russian genius with a bewildering love of nature, of the humblest creatures, and all the poor and suffering. It demands the renouncement of reason in favour of animal instinct, and fills the heart with infinite compassion. This simple feeling of brotherly love and extravagant affection generally gives their literature a particularly sympathetic character. The initiators of this movement, after writing for their peers—the educated classes—wrote in terms of dismayed compassion for the masses. It was the descent of the poet into limbo.

> "... l'angoscia delle genti
> Che son quaggiù, nel viso mi dipigne
> Quella pietà. ..."

Gogol, with his bitter irony, has peered into those dismal depths. Turgeneff has plunged into them from the zenith of his artistic dreams, more in thought than as an active apostle. Tolstoy, having arrived at the end of his sceptic doubts, becomes the most determined of all these apostles of human compassion; but, owing to his origin and his training, he is of those who having risen high, fall into the abyss below. From beneath him we see those who come forth and bring with them from the lower depths that great cry of resignation and fraternity begun by those coarse and deplorable geniuses, Nekrasoff and Dostoyevsky, and since continued by a flood of inferior contemporaries.

At first sight one is touched and fascinated by this great stream of sympathy. But, unfortunately, I remember and reflect. I recall to mind that we also had our era of sentimentality coupled with vulgarity. Twenty years before '93, everybody loved everybody else; we returned to the country, lived the simple life, shed tears over the husbandman, until he began to cut our throats. The almost mathematically precise law of historic oscillations demands that such effusions are followed by terrible reactions, and that sweet compassion turns into sour rancour, and tenderheartedness into fury. *Di avertant omen!*

I regret having to end with such distressing forebodings. If Russia has to pass through critical times, such as no nation has as yet escaped, it will at least be in her youth. She will arise stronger and with a new lease of a more robust life. One often hears Hamlet's words applied to her as to there being "something rotten" in that empire. Possibly, but in any case the rottenness is confined to the bark. The core of that mighty tree is sound and full of sap. This at least is the conviction of all who have been in the country and studied the writers who witness to it. Behind their mental maladies, behind the passing Nihilism of a Tolstoy and the intellectual spasms of a Dostoyevsky, one feels there is a deep-rooted vitality and

a soul ready to submit to any sound words that will arouse her.

Judging from their language, which is unmistakable, they seem as if weary and worn out before they have lived, like young people who are in despair waiting long for the moment of action to arrive. They at times seem to be themselves unaware that they possess the treble treasure of life—faith, hope and love. As soon as one digs down the lode glistens and clanks. It is the pledge of their future greatness.

That is what I have discovered in this Russian land.—Poor, pale Russia! Her sons will, perhaps, tell me that I have painted her in too ghastly a colour, that I have not been able to breathe the perfume of her pungent air. That would be an unmerited insult. We belong to a world that is content to grow older by the dim light of austere reason, which looks coldly on life whilst trying to understand its phenomena. But when, owing to the inconclusiveness of the eternal rush of human life, this anxiety for an understanding ceases to trouble our soul and allows it to return to its primitive instincts, we realize and feel how well this land can be loved, though still in the savage nudity of its youth. Even though the plough has till now only run a few furrows, the hand of man has not as yet effaced the imprint of that of the Creator. She retains the charm of great sadness, the most powerful, perhaps, because the happiest amongst us at heart deplores the waste of things, whatever they may be, and though he may never have known them.

Virgin soil! Crude and vague like her children, made in her image, like their heart and speech, she cannot tell of the curious histories of the past as known to older lands. She ever speaks in melancholy murmurs with the sad music of the sea.

I send her this book, in return for many years of hospitality and for all she has taught me: I would not speak

ill of her in these pages, but I trust I have put into practice the first of all the virtues demanded by literature from her scribes—sincerity. May she find her own thoughts faithfully translated, and recognize, without too much disparagement, the image of herself, ever before my eyes.

END.

APPENDIX

To enable my readers to verify my facts I append a list of Russian works referred to by me translated into French.

It is not a complete list, for many old translations have been omitted. Some of those mentioned below are out of print. Most of the translations (especially poetry) only give an approximation to the Russian text, some not even that. Lately more care has been taken, but even amongst those I mention below some are very short of being even approximately correct. I can, however, thoroughly recommend any translated by Turgeneff, Mérimée, Viardot and Victor Derély.

The Wars of Igor. Tr. Fory-Rion. 1878.

KARAMSIN.

History of Russia. Tr. Jauffret. 11 vols. 1826.

PUSHKIN.

Poetic Selections. Tr. Dupont. 2 vols. 1846.
Dramatic Works. Tr. N——. 1 vol. 1858.
Poltava, the Prisoner of the Caucasus. Tr. Porry. 1 vol. 1858.
The Captain's Daughter. Tr. Viardot. 1 vol. 1853.
Boris Godunoff and Poems. Tr. Turgeneff and Viardot. 1 vol. 1862.
The Queen of Spades, and The Bohemians. Tr. Mérimée. 1 vol. 1852.

LERMONTOFF.

The Demon. Tr. in verse, d'Angers. 1 vol. 1858.
,, Tr. Anosoff. 1 vol. 1860.
A Hero of our Times. Tr. Marmier. 1 vol. 1856.

GRIBOYEDOFF.

The Penalty for being too Clever. Tr. Legrelle.

Gogol.

Tarass Bulba. Tr. Viardot. 1 vol. 1853.
The Greatcoat. Tr. Marmier. 1856.
Dead Souls. Tr. Moreau. 1858.
,, Tr. Charrière. 2 vols. 1859, reprint 1885.
The Inspector-General. Tr. Mérimée. 1 vol. 1853.

Turgeneff.

His entire works have been translated, under his supervision, by Charrière, Mérimée, Viardot.

Goncharoff.

Oblomoff. Tr. N——. 185–.
Mark, the Nihilist. Tr. adapted from Gothi. 1 vol. 1886.

Pisemsky.

In the Whirlwind. Tr. Derély. 1 vol. 1881.
A Thousand Souls. Tr. Derély. 2 vols. 1886.
The Doers. Tr. Derély. 1 vol. 1886.

Dostoyevsky.

The Humbled and Outraged. Tr. Humbert. 1 vol. 1884.
Crime and Punishment. Tr. Derély. 2 vols. 1884.
Recollections from the House of the Dead. Tr. Neyroud. 1 vol. 1886.
The Possessed. Tr. Derély. 2 vols. 1886.
The Idiot. Tr. Derély. 2 vols. 1887.
Brothers Karamazoff. Tr. Derély. 2 vols. 1888.
Poor Folk. Tr. Derély. 1 vol. 1888.
Krotkaya. Tr. Halpérine. 1 vol. 1886.
The Underground Spirit. Tr. Halpérine. 1 vol. 1886.

Count Leo Tolstoy.

The Cossacks: Scenes round Sebastopol. Tr. by a Russian Lady. 188–.
War and Peace. Tr. by a Russian Lady. 3 vols. 1884.
Anna Karenina. 2 vols. 1885.
Katya. Tr. d'Hauterive. 1 vol. 1886.
Childhood, Adolescence and Youth. Tr. Barin.
My Religion. 1 vol. 1885.

There now remains for me a twofold obligation.

I must express my own sense of gratitude, and that of all French readers of Tolstoy, to the patient translator of *War and Peace*, who was the first to introduce us to the labours of her illustrious compatriot.

I must also express my thanks to those who by their previous labours have facilitated my own studies of the Slavs. First of all to Mr. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu. By common consent his translations referring to the Northern Empire are in Russia and elsewhere considered the most complete and best informed ever published in Western Europe. Our country does not realize how such labours do him honour in other countries. The same applies to the *History of Russia* and *Russian Epic*, by Mr. Rambaud, which have been of the greatest assistance to me. Lastly I must mention Messrs. Courrière and Dupays. Their writings contain everything which might be missed in this study.

GLOSSARY

The English reader has hitherto been the victim of French and German transliteration of Russian words and names.

The following modification of the Hunterian system (adopted by the India Office for Asiatic transliteration) seems to meet our requirements.

1. All vowels as in German.

2. All consonants as in English, provided that "g" is always hard, and that "e" is often preceded by a gentle "y" sound: where this sound is strong the "y" is best inserted.

The accompanying list contains most of the names appearing in "The Russian Novel," transliterated on the above system, and with their proper emphasis.

H. A. S.

LIST OF RUSSIAN NAMES

A.

Akuli'na.
Aksakoff.
A'skold.

B.

Bagrasion.
Baklu'shin.
Baku'nin.
Barati'nsky.
Baza'roff.
Ba'zushkoff.
Beli'nsky (Bye'linski).
Be'lkin (Bye'lkin).
Bezu'shoff.
Bi'libin.
Bilko'nsky.
Bori's.
Bu'lba.

C.

Chayada'yeff.
Chekunoff.
Cherka'sky.

D.

Dostoye'vsky.
Dye'vushkin.

F.

Fe'dor.

G.

Godu'noff.
Go'gol (Go'g'l).
Griboye'doff.
Go'ncharoff.
Grigo'rovich.

H. (*Kh*).

Hamekoff.

I.

I'gor (I'g'r).
Ilich.

J.

Jukovsky.

K.

Karama'zoff.
Karata'yeff.
Karava'zoff.
Kare'nin.
Kare'nina.
Kiriloff.
Kirsa'noff.
Kutu'zoff.

L.

Leo'.
Le'vin.
Lo'ris.

M.

Marmela'doff.
Me'likoff.
Micha'iloff.
Mui'shkin.

N.

Nekra'soff.
Nyejda'noff.

O.

Oblo'moff.
O'lenin.
Onc'gin.
Ostromir.
Ostro'vsky.

P.

Pa'skevich.
Petrushe'vsky.
Porfi'r.
Potie'shin.
Pu'shkin.

R.

Rago'zin.
Raskol'nikoff.
Ru'rik.

S.

Sama'rin.
Sha'doff.
Skutaro'ff.
So'lomin.
So'ltikoff.
Suta'yeff.
Svidriga'yeloff.

T.

Taras (Bu'lba).
Tol'stoy.
Turge'neff.

U.

Ukra'ina.

V.

Valko'vsky.
Veresha'gin.
Vronsky.

Y.

Yazikoff.
Yermo'loff.

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